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Exploring School Counselors' Narratives of CACREP Accredited Online Education Programs

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Exploring School Counselors' Narratives of CACREP Accredited Online Education Programs

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Counselor Education

by

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Abstract

Online education is a growing part of academia. The number of online school-counseling programs is also increasing and beginning to include face-to-face and online programs. Little research describes online education and even less discusses online school-counseling programs. The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret participants' experiences of being trained and graduating from a CACREP online school-counseling master's program, as well as how their training prepared them for their current role as a school counselor. A qualitative inquiry was conducted to understand online school-counseling programs and reported how six professional school counselors perceived their online program with a Council for Accreditation for Counseling and Related Educational Programs accreditation prepared them for their role in schools. Participants revealed information about their reasons for choosing an online program, interactions with peers and faculty, and how the program impacted their role as a current professional school counselor.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to all professional school counselors who are making a difference in schools. The work is important and necessary.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Online education has changed the landscape of higher education. Colleges and universities are continually creating more online classes and programs. With the increase in the number of online programs, students have more options in the type of education they would like to receive. In addition, online programs help meet the needs of adult learners who want to pursue higher education (Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009; Menn & Chaney, 2014). Online programs offer opportunities that face-to-face programs are unable to offer. One type of growing program is an online school-counseling master's degree, but little research has been conducted to evaluate the quality of the education students receive online, especially in school-counseling programs. Online learning is generally perceived to have inferior outcomes compared to face-to-face classes (Allen, Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2012; Blumenstyk, 2008). This perception, however, does not appear to be research-based (Allen & Seaman, 2014). To have a richer understanding of online programs, more research needs to be conducted.

As of 2012, 7.1 million students in the United States reported taking at least one online course through an institution of higher education, and the number of students taking online courses is continuing to grow (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Riley, 2013; Saba, 2005). A survey of administrators of higher education revealed that almost two thirds believe it very likely that a majority of students will participate in at least one online class in the next 5 years. However, 1% of administrators did not believe it would be likely for the majority of students to enroll in an online class (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Overall, online education appears to be increasing in popularity.

The focus of this study is on participants' narratives about earning a master's degree in school counseling from an online Council for Accreditation for Counseling and Related

Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited program and how the online program prepared them to be a professional school counselor. Little is known about the experience of earning an online school counseling master's degree, but school counselors who graduate from these programs are still expected to be leaders in their schools and communities (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). School counselors have the same responsibilities, regardless of if they graduated from an online or face-to-face program.

Need for Further Research

Institutions of higher education offer face-to-face, blended or hybrid, or fully online classes. These institutions have changed from offering only individual classes online to having entire programs online that reach students on and off campus (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Beaudoin, 2016; Ozdemir & McDaniel, 2013). The change from offering a selection of classes online to entire programs allows students who are unable to come to campus to pursue higher education. As colleges and universities are working to reach more students, administrators are responsible for overseeing the creation of online classes and programs.

Administrators at colleges and universities have reported that offering online classes and programs is an important part of their strategic plan (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Riley, 2013), but did not specifically state why online education is a significant part of the strategic plan. Possible reasons will be discussed in Chapter 2. Online education is gaining in popularity; therefore, it is important for college and universities to incorporate this format into plans for educating students (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Bejerano, 2008). Because online education is expanding, it is important to have a better understanding of what this means for administrators, faculty, and students.

Research is needed to understand online education as a whole, but also to understand the specific programs offered through this medium, such as school-counseling programs. Although

online programs are gaining in popularity, the programs have yet to offer evidence of their efficacy (Beaudoin, 2016). The American School Counseling Association's (ASCA, 2016) website lists 14 online programs. However, the programs are not all relegated to a school-counseling master's degree. The titles of the degrees include Human Services Counseling, Counseling with K–12 emphasis, and other variations (ASCA, 2016). Of the 14 programs listed, 10 are accredited by CACREP.

People who want to attend an online school counseling program need to be aware of the licensing requirements for the state in which they would like to work. Each state has its own requirements for licensing and some do not allow online coursework toward their certification or license (Ozdemir & McDaniel, 2013; Riley, 2013). Because each state has its own licensing/certification requirements, students may not meet the requirements of certain states and will be unable to practice in those states as a school counselor if they pursue an online degree.

Significance of the Study

The research study is significant because there is a growing need for school counselors. It is important to understand how school counselors are trained and their perception of preparation to be a professional school counselor. According to ASCA legislative affairs (2018), the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Conference Committee released a report that was a negotiation of the House and Senate fiscal year. In this document, it is reported that the Nelson/Rubio amendment is “allocating \$10 million to establish an innovative partnership between universities and school districts to combat the shortages of school counselors” (ASCA, 2018, para. 2 “Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Conference Committee”). The report also stated that a possible improvement to the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Act would provide funding to “lower the

staffing ratio for school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers” (ASCA, 2018, para. 5 “Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Conference Committee”). If schools need more school counselors, college and universities will need to keep up with the demand. A way colleges and universities can meet the demand is online education.

Online learning is one of “most important innovation(s) in education since the printing press” (Beaudoin, 2016, p. 11). Online learning is changing the way people are educated. This method of education is offering access to higher education to people who may not have the same access to traditional programs. Access to programs may be limited because of geographical location, such as living in a rural community, or lifestyle responsibilities, such as having a family or full-time job that affects the flexibility of attending a traditional program. Online education may allow for flexibility that a traditional program may be unable to offer. It is important to have a clear understanding of what this means for school counselors’ training and role in a school.

Online learning environments differ from face-to-face classrooms (Quinn & Barth, 2014), lacking the same connection to faculty and peers as face-to-face environments. However, they provide more convenience for learners who wish to study from home. Online learning classes and programs still have a duty to:

demonstrate a commitment to diversity, provide support for student development, ensure the faculty has the skills and knowledge to teach at a distance, contain administrative structures and supports for delivering explicit curriculum at a distance, and possess resources and funds to put on the [online] program. (Quinn & Barth, 2014, p. 35)

Distance learners have a right to expect the same level of support and education as those attending institutions of learning (Quinn & Barth, 2014). The expectation is that online learning makes every effort to offer the same quality of training as a face-to-face program.

This research project provides insight on online school-counseling programs. Participants shared their stories about online education, and how it impacted them as professional school counselors. Through their reflections, deeper meaning and understanding were produced, and may impact how school-counseling programs offer coursework. The information and insight from this study may help educators who teach online classes gain a deeper understanding of what students are learning from their classes. The information will help inform future research endeavors about online school-counseling programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret participants' narratives of being trained and graduating from a CACREP online school-counseling master's program, as well as how their training prepared them for their current role as a school counselor. Very little is known about these types of programs, but the popularity of online education is increasing (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Riley, 2013; Saba, 2005). This research is not meant to evaluate the effectiveness of online education. This exploratory study initiates understanding of online education from a student perspective. Participants in the research study told their stories about earning a master's degree through an online program. Through the telling of their stories, participants expressed what it meant to them to have this experience, and how it prepared them for their current school-counseling position.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

How do school counselors make meaning of their experience of an online school-counseling program?

Research Question 2

How do the school counselors perceive their online experience prepared them to work in their current positions?

Methodology

Narrative inquiry focuses on stories told by people about their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013). This research study focused on the narratives of school counselors who earned a master's degree from a CACREP-accredited online program. The narratives assisted in developing a deeper understanding of the experience. Six school counselors agreed to participate in the research study. All six participants had an initial semistructured interview. Participants also filled out a time-task analysis to discern how their time was spent as a school counselor in their various school environments and sent artifacts from their online school-counseling program to support their narratives. All data were coded to produce the final themes presented in Chapter Four.

Researcher's Relationship to the Problem

The researcher identifies as a professional school counselor. This is an identity that is important and remains part of her even though the researcher is not currently working as professional school counselor. The researcher's training as a school counselor provided the knowledge and skills to work effectively with all stakeholders: students, parents, administrators, and members of the community. As a future counselor educator, the researcher is interested in learning the stories of school counselors who experienced training different than her face-to-face education. The researcher's background as a school counselor affected how the researcher interpreted the data (Creswell, 2013). It is important that, as a researcher, the researcher is aware

of her reflexivity, which consists of the researcher's "biases, values, and experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 216).

The researcher's school counseling master's degree was from a face-to-face program that was not CACREP accredited. The researcher's training in this program gave her some background in how schools train school counselors. The researcher is also a doctoral student at a CACREP university. This university has a face-to-face school-counseling program. The researcher's training with a face-to-face program and her work as a professional school counselor has impacted her beliefs about how school counselors need to be trained. The researcher needs to be aware of how her own training and her experience with a face-to-face CACREP school-counseling program influenced the lens through which the researcher viewed other programs.

Reflexivity

As a school counselor and a future counselor educator, the researcher has a stake in how school counselors are educated. School counselors have an important role in the school setting. They are responsible for all students' academic, personal, and career needs (ASCA, 2016). These three domains require the school counselor to have many responsibilities in the school setting. The researcher takes all these duties very seriously because they impact students.

The academic domain encompasses individual student planning. The researcher assisted students with developing a plan for success in their current grade and enabled them to progress to the next grade at the end of the year. One example of individual student planning is helping a student be successful academically. The researcher identified students who were struggling in their coursework and coordinated necessary services.

As a school counselor, the researcher coordinated responsive services, which included identifying students and organizing services for students who were experiencing personal issues such as problems with friends or family. Without the appropriate training, the researcher would not have been able to respond to these situations effectively. Her knowledge and skills came from her training during her master's program.

The last major duty for a counselor was career development. As students' progress through school, they start to refine their potential career interests. The researcher's role in career exploration was to assist students in identifying their individual interests and skills. Once students developed self-awareness, the researcher coordinated opportunities for them to explore a variety of careers.

As a former school counselor, the researcher has an individual perception for the role of a school counselor. The researcher's training instilled the need to be accountable for handling students' academic, personal, and career needs. It is important to the researcher that all school counselors understand how to respond to the needs of their students.

As a future counselor educator and a graduate of a CACREP-accredited program, the researcher wanted to know how to best train students. Because online education is growing in popularity, it is likely that the researcher will have opportunities, or even be required to teach classes through an online format. The researcher wants to be as effective as possible, but little research on online education including students' narratives about their experiences of training. The researcher believes she will be a better counselor educator and have a better understanding of the experience through the students' perspectives.

The researcher's master's program was a 100% face-to-face program. The researcher's worked as a school counselor as she finished her last year of her degree and then for an

additional year after graduation. The researcher's experience of training and working has shaped her perspective of effective school-counselor training. The researcher has an individual perception of the benefits and drawbacks of a face-to-face program. The researcher conducted this study to have a similar understanding of online programs.

Definition of Terms

American School Counseling Association (ASCA) standards: the ASCA National Model addresses four types of standards: content standards, program standards, performance standards, and ethical standards. Standards are statements of what should be done in each area (ASCA, 2012).

Asynchronous learning: Learners may participate in an online-learning course at times different from when the course is taught (Brazina & Ugras, 2014).

Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP): The highest accreditation a counseling program can earn (Sweeney, 1992).

Delivery: The means around which the school-counseling program is organized and delivered, including direct services (school-counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services) and indirect student services (referrals, consultation, and collaboration; ASCA, 2012).

Distance education or distance learning: Students and their instructors are in different geographical locations and instruction occurs on an electronic device (Brazina & Ugras, 2014).

Foundation: Includes program focus, student competencies, and professional competencies (ASCA, 2012).

Individual student planning: Ongoing systemic activities designed to assist an individual student in establishing personal goals and developing future plans, such as individual learning plans and graduation plans (ASCA, 2012).

Management: Addresses the organization and allocation of resources to best address the goals of the school-counseling program (ASCA, 2012).

Massive open online course (MOOC): A course of study made available over the Internet without charge to a large number of people (Brazina & Ugras, 2014).

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education: An accrediting body for school-counseling programs.

Responsive services: Activities that meet students' immediate needs and concerns (ASCA, 2012).

School-counseling core curriculum: Structured developmental lessons designed to assist students in attaining the competencies from the ASCA Student Standards and presented systematically through classroom and group activities K–12 (ASCA, 2012).

Synchronous learning: Learners participate in an online learning course at the same time but in different locations (Brazina & Ugras, 2014).

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret participants' experiences of being trained and graduating from a CACREP online school-counseling master's program, as well as how their training prepared them for their current role as a school counselor. A review of related literature was conducted to begin to understand online education, the role of a school counselor, and counselor education. Journal articles, books, and Internet sources provided information related to the topics discussed in this chapter.

In this chapter, information about online education, school counseling, and counselor education is described. There is also information about the history of online education and the view of online education from an institution and faculty perspective, explaining roles and responsibilities and also possible benefits and drawbacks for students.

Online Education

Institutions of higher education are changing the way students are educated (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Beaudoin, 2016). One change is offering online classes and programs. The inclusion of online classes and programs affects institutions, faculty, and students. The change from only face-to-face classes to online classes has had positive and negative impacts on stakeholders (Lei & Gupta, 2010). To better understand online education, it is important to understand how it began and how it changed over time.

History of Online Education

Online education originated from the first correspondence courses of the 18th and 19th centuries (Holmberg, 2008). Charles Toussaint and Gustav Langenscheidt established some of the first courses in Germany (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015). This type of coursework began in the United States in 1873, created by Anna Eliot Ticknor, who initiated a foundation for

at-home study (Mathieson, 1971; Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015). Although Ticknor created the first correspondence course, William Harper brought correspondence courses to institutions of higher education. These courses were between students and institutions of higher education that were separated geographically (Mathieson, 1971), dubbed *distance education*.

In the 1920s, distance education began using the radio, with 176 radio stations created for educational purposes (Simonson et al., 2015). Radios remained a popular mechanism for a decade, but beginning in the 1930s, three universities experimented with using television in their distance education: University of Iowa, Purdue University, and Kansas State College (Simonson et al., 2015). It was not until the 1950s that students could receive credit for these courses.

The next advancement in distance education was the creation of satellite technology, developed in the 1960s (Simonson et al., 2015). Satellites were used to broadcast educational experiences through television. However, this method was not widespread until the 1980s because of the cost (Simonson et al., 2015).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, distance education was affected by the creation of fiber-optic communication systems, renamed *online education*. Students and faculty could experience “live, two-way, high-quality audio and video” (Simonson et al., 2015, p. 38). During this time, the Internet came into existence and has provided the technology to assist with the rapid increase of online education (Simonson et al., 2015). For example, in 1986 most online students lived in geographically isolated areas (Roberts, 1996). By 1994, students who lived in urban areas were also participating in online education (Roberts, 1996).

Distance education was also affected in the 1990s by “changes in the US economy, technological innovations, and historic international developments” (Saba, 2005, p. 256). The economy started experiencing a recession in the early 1990s, prompting some people to go back

to school. They had the option of attending a distance program or a traditional program.

Another online option is MOOCs. These college-level courses are free to the public (Simonson et al., 2015) and differ from online classes or programs because they are free. An online class or program is offered to students who have been accepted to the university or program for a cost.

Institutions

Institutions of higher education are categorized as 2-year or 4-year as well as public or private. Online classes and programs are most widely offered at public institutions with a student body of more than 15,000 (Bejerano, 2008), offering students who attend these types of universities a large selection of online classes or programs. Liberal arts or private not-for-profit research universities do not offer as many online education options (McPherson & Bacow, 2015). Of students who attend liberal arts colleges, only 2% have some classes online. Private not-for-profit research university students have all, some, and none (2%, 5%, and 93%, respectively) of their classes online. Colleges with the highest percent of students taking all of their classes online are private for-profit institutions. Private not-for-profit 4-year institutions and public 2-year institutions had 10% of their student population taking online classes. The more selective and prestigious the institution, the fewer online classes offered (McPherson & Bacow, 2015). Online programs are more likely to be offered at doctoral and research institutions than baccalaureate schools (Bejerano, 2008); however, the largest student population taking online classes attends community colleges (Bejerano, 2008). The type of university and classification of the student influenced whether online education was an option.

Benefits for institutions. Cost and convenience are two reasons an institution may consider offering online classes (McPherson & Bacow, 2015). Administrators also report economic downturn as a reason to offer more online programs throughout the university (Allen

& Seaman, 2010). In a survey conducted by Allen and Seaman (2014), administrators reported the following list ranking the reasons for offering MOOCs:

1. Increasing institutional visibility,
2. Driving student recruitment,
3. Innovative pedagogy,
4. Flexible learning opportunities,
5. Reaching new students,
6. Supplementing on-campus learning,
7. Exploring cost reductions,
8. Learning about scaling, and
9. Generating income (p. 25)

Lei and Gupta (2010) describe additional benefits for institutions such as extending class offerings which could diminish concerns about overcrowding or scheduling conflicts with other classes. If a student does not have to travel to campus to learn, the institution may have greater appeal than institutions that require on-campus learning. Online programs create opportunities for students who are in remote or rural areas (Quinn & Barth, 2014). Online education has a positive impact on institutions of higher education.

Difficulties for institutions. Institutions may experience some difficulties, such as struggles with finding classroom or computer laboratory space (Lei & Gupta, 2010), followed by problems selecting the appropriate computer hardware and software. It can also be costly to continually update these systems. Once the technology is in place, students and faculty may need to learn how to use it and may resist change, due to being out of their comfort zones. Institutions may also experience some difficulty recruiting students from a lower socioeconomic

status. Students may also be resistant to paying fees associated with online education courses (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Other disadvantages may include the following:

- Inadequate initial training to use online technology by instructors and students,
- Experiencing incompatible technology issues (e.g., difference in software versions),
- Limiting faculty compensation and travel to learn new online software,
- Limiting professional development funding for faculty (Lei & Gupta, 2010, p. 627),
- Contending with a changing learner landscape, reflecting new needs and demands,
- Monitoring and reducing the so-called digital divide that separates resources from prospective users,
- Enhancing access for users and opportunity for providers without compromising quality,
- Resolving the frequent tension between technology and pedagogy,
- Determining effective applications of social networks for learning,
- Achieving authentic assessments of learning outcomes in online settings,
- Balancing issues of academic freedom and intellectual property in online course development,
- Countering the prevailing myths in the distance education field that perpetuate hostility,
- Resisting the influence of others with limited expertise in online education,
- Navigating the hazards of regulatory initiatives and other impediments to growth,
- Getting complex new programs functioning quickly within the environments with no precedents,

- Interacting with diverse partners, some with little or no experience in online education,
- Directing teams in accomplishing multiple tasks, often with pressing deadlines, and
- Identifying and implementing suitable virtual teaching/learning tools for optimum effectiveness. (Beaudoin, 2016, pp. 17–18)

Institutions using online learning require the infrastructure to support it, which can be costly to create. Technology is constantly changing, which could require universities to invest in continual updates.

Institutions may consider all benefits and difficulties before creating online classes and programs. The benefits may outweigh the disadvantages, which may explain the growth in online education. If administrators have the following qualities, the online program may have a better chance of success and survival:

- Committing to a transformative leadership style,
- Being able to create conditions for innovation and change,
- Recognizing that the priority is managing change, rather than technology,
- Possessing sound knowledge of distance education theory and practice,
- Having patience, resilience, dedication, and tolerance for ambiguity and risk,
- Being able to distinguish between and utilize both strategic and tactical planning,
- Applying diagnostic skills to assess situations before acting,
- Utilizing data for decision making,
- Focusing on both the micro and macro perspectives,
- Operationalizing one's vision, not just espouse it,
- Being an articulate and informed advocate of distance education,

- Valuing and engaging in networking, sharing ideas, strategies, and resources,
- Being enterprising, but resisting early adoption of what is currently in vogue,
- Maintaining a commitment to quality,
- And always decide and act as a learner-centered educator. (Beaudoin, 2016, p. 18)

When administrators at all levels of higher education were surveyed about the training they provided for their faculty members who teach online classes, 19% reported they do not offer any training for their faculty. However, 59% offer informal mentoring and 40% have a formal mentoring system for their faculty (Allen & Seaman, 2010), with 15% using an outside resource to train their faculty. Private for-profit institutions are least likely to offer any specific training but most likely to have a mentoring system in place for their faculty (Allen & Seaman, 2010). This view suggests that faculty members who teach online classes receive little training on how to teach effectively. Mentoring seems to be the most used method, but no information emerged on what is included in mentoring online faculty.

Effective institutional leadership is important for the growth and development of online education. Leadership can be defined as “creating the conditions for innovative change” (Beaudoin, 2016, p. 16). The leadership of a university has the power to encourage change by supporting new and creative ways of educating students.

Faculty

Faculty plays an important role in online education. It is essential to nurture faculty members who may be resistant and pessimistic about online education (Beaudoin, 2016). It is possible that if faculty members changed their attitudes about online learning, other stakeholders would also change their attitudes. Mentoring may positively impact faculty members’ attitudes (Allen & Seaman, 2010).

Attitudes may change when the benefits of online education are explained. For example, faculty noted general flexibility as a benefit of online classes (Bejerano, 2008; Lei & Gupta, 2010). This flexibility could be in location and in time, because a class can be taught from any location at any time. With an online class, the faculty member does not have to have specific office hours. They can communicate with students, plan their classes, or engage in the other duties of teaching from any location at any time. Faculty are also able to update students about course changes in real time (Barr & Miller, 2013). In research conducted by Lei and Gupta (2010), faculty members could expect to promote deep-learning skills, critical-thinking skills, and more personal dialogue between the instructor and students as well as personal dialogue peer to peer. Students may feel more comfortable communicating opinions in an online forum (Lei & Gupta, 2010). If a student is more comfortable expressing an opinion, the student may participate more in the learning process. Instructors could also maximize participation and learning by being student-centered. Last, online faculty may also experience a decrease in commuting time because they do not have to go to campus. Not going to campus also helps decrease the annoyances associated with parking (Lei & Gupta, 2010). The benefits may increase professors' attitudes toward online education. Despite many benefits, online learning has drawbacks.

Faculty at a variety of institutions of higher education were surveyed about their attitudes regarding online learning. Of those surveyed, 58% had a negative attitude, compared to 42% who displayed positivity toward online learning (Allen, Seaman, Lederman, & Jaschik, 2012). Positive and negative attitudes may have pertained to their beliefs about online education. Faculty will need to structure learning to achieve higher order learning, developing their teaching practices, assessments, and instructional objectives differently from a traditional classroom (Lei

& Gupta, 2010). Lei and Gupta did not define instructional objectives or explain why they would be different. When initially developing the course, faculty members may experience some cognitive overload because they are recreating a class. Faculty members may also have trouble motivating students, assessing students' affective traits, and preventing cheating on quizzes and tests (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Instructors will also need patience with students and not expect immediate responses to questions posted. An increase in polarized student evaluations of the teacher and online course may arise, due to attitudes toward online education.

Faculty reported spending more time and effort teaching an online class (Allen et al., 2012; Bejerano, 2008). Faculty may have a more specific plan about the information presented in the class compared to face-to-face faculty. Faculty members may also need more time and greater effort to set up an online class than a face-to-face class. Lei and Gupta (2010) reported that online classes do need more structure, which could result in more time spent creating and facilitating the class.

It is important for students to learn the content of the classes they are taking, regardless of if the class is online or face-to-face. Students' understanding of class material is generally measured through learning outcomes. Allen et al. (2012) surveyed faculty to learn about their beliefs of online learning outcomes. To be part of the survey, a faculty member was required to teach at least one online class. When faculty were surveyed, 66% rated the learning outcomes of an online class as *inferior or somewhat inferior* when compared to face-to-face learning (Allen et al., 2012). However, 6% of faculty members reported a belief that learning outcomes were *superior or somewhat superior* when comparing learning outcomes of an online class to a face-to-face class (Allen et al., 2012). Faculty members with more experience teaching online classes may be more likely to have a positive outlook on learning outcomes. For example, Kolowich

(2013) reported that online professors believed their online and face-to-face classes were equally rigorous. For faculty members who teach at institutions without online classes, 83% rated learning outcomes as *inferior* or *somewhat inferior* (Allen et al., 2012). However, only 26% of administrators believed the learning outcomes for online courses were inferior to face-to-face programs. (Allen & Seaman, 2014). The issue with understanding whether learning outcomes for online programs are *inferior* or *superior* to face-to-face is that these beliefs are based on perceptions. Bejerano (2008) stated online education might be more appropriate for lower order cognitive tasks such as basic recall of information but might be less appropriate for higher- order tasks such the application of information. There is little data to describes learning outcomes for online programs.

When rating learning outcomes, appropriate assessment tools need to be available. Face-to-face programs have established systems in place to assess learning outcomes. However, these systems may not be appropriate for online programs (Allen et al., 2012). Nearly two thirds of surveyed faculty members do not believe appropriate assessments are available to measure online learning outcomes from their institutions (Allen et al., 2012). Lacking an appropriate assessment for online-course outcomes, the institution and faculty do not have any data about the effectiveness of the classes offered online. Administrators of online learning programs are beginning to investigate the quality of teaching, seeking to understand the outcomes in relation to quality and effectiveness (McPherson & Bacow, 2015). Faculty have mixed beliefs about the effectiveness of online education, and no appropriate way exists to measure the effectiveness of an online class for students.

Students

People may choose an online program for many reasons, including time restrictions such as work schedules. They “cannot afford the residential or commuting costs, or [they] are house bound by children, with a disability, or other constraints” (del Valle & Duffy, 2009, p. 130).

While participating in an online class, learners must manage their own time and learning (del Valle & Duffy, 2009; Wang, Peng, Huang, Hou, & Wang, 2008). To effectively succeed, they need to be self-directed and able to monitor their progress toward the established learning goals (Comer, Lenaghan, & Sengupta, 2015; Wang et al., 2008). Self-management includes having a strategy for approaching learning. When students had a strategy for learning and were more engaged, it significantly impacted learners’ achievement (del Valle & Duffy, 2009; Wang et al., 2008). Success was also impacted by a students’ self-efficacy because their confidence with online learning enhanced their ability to adopt learning strategies (Wang et al., 2008). To help increase a student’s self-efficacy, Wang et al. (2008) suggested online classes offer opportunities for students to experience success or observe other students’ successful learning behaviors.

Motivation has a direct impact on student learning outcomes (Wang et al., 2008). Intrinsic motivation is more effective than extrinsic motivation with online learners. It is suggested that online learning environments are created to support intrinsic motivation (Wang et al., 2008). Students may struggle because of decreased motivational support and structure (Barr & Miller, 2013; del Valle & Duffy, 2009) such as lack of course relevancy, self-efficacy, and reinforcement (Lim & Kim, 2003).

Universities offering online programs specifically aim to recruit a diverse population of students (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Programs appeal to nontraditional students, which is a growing population in higher education (de Alva, 2010). Online education provides an option to students

who tend to be geographically isolated. Traditional classes are not conducive for students who are geographically isolated or have busy schedules (Bejerano, 2008; Columbaro & Monaghan, 2009; Lei & Gupta, 2010). Online classrooms provide an opportunity to earn a degree for diverse learners such as adults with children, adults with full-time employment, or those otherwise considered nontraditional students (Bejerano, 2008; Reese, 2015). Therefore, online education may have started out as an opportunity for rural students, but now rural and urban people engage in online learning (Roberts, 1996). Online education benefits students who may not have another option, due to their specific circumstances.

Another benefit students may experience is a removal of teacher biases because the teacher is not interacting with the student in a face-to-face manner. Online class may force the teacher to be more methodical and consistent (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Students benefit from consistency because they know what to expect from the class. Another benefit for students may include advancement in their career while also taking online classes, which allows students the flexibility to concurrently work and go to school. Students can work on classes at their own pace at any location with Internet access. Students also do not have to experience the inconvenience of commuting and trying to be part of a college or university community. Students can also enhance their practical skills (Lei & Gupta, 2010) because they are working while earning a degree. Students may benefit from limited interactions with peers, which may help reduce distractions and culture shock (Lei & Gupta, 2010, p. 629). Online programs may allow students to have more opportunities for learning than a traditional face-to-face education (Menn & Chaney, 2014; Raj & Al-Alawneh, 2010). Overall, there are many benefits for students such as an option to attend an institution of higher education if geographically isolated, flexibility to

work and attend school, and possible reduction of culture shock because of limited interactions with peers.

Some drawbacks include lack of access to or means to pay for Internet or the appropriate technology for online classes (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Students who are taking traditional classes may have this problem, but no Internet or appropriate technology may be more limiting for a student who wants to take online classes. Students may feel isolated or disconnected from their peers and professors during the online-learning experience (Barr & Miller, 2013). They may struggle to feel connected because online students do not have the same opportunity to connect with peers and faculty as their on-campus counterparts (Bejerano, 2008). Students lack of interactions with peers and faculty could create misunderstandings. Limited interaction with faculty members can be especially problematic due to delayed feedback and lack of direct assistance and explanation (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Communication can also be difficult because there is no face-to-face contact. This lack of direct contact may impact a student's "emotional involvement in the learning process" (Lim & Kim, 2003, p. 437). It is important that all communication between the professor and students is as clear as possible (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Communication may come in the form of teacher feedback. Students reported teacher feedback was an important part of their interactions with their professors (Barr & Miller, 2013). Other inconveniences are that students may not have the appropriate abilities to navigate online classes or programs or may also experience some anxiety about various challenges associated with online classes such as submitting assignments or a belief that the online class has more required work than a traditional face-to-face course (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Students may also have difficulty paying the technology fee for each online class (Lei & Gupta, 2010). Students who participate in online classes may experience frustration associated with technology not working

or may feel discouraged by the lack of face-to-face contact that an in-person class would experience.

Another concern for students who complete online education programs is *degree confusion*. Degree confusion occurs when members of the college community lack understanding and standardization among online programs (Allen & Seaman, (2014). Employers and licensing boards may be unsure of the qualifications of a person who graduated from an online program (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Students may have difficulty finding employment due to degree confusion. Of academic administrators, 64% reported a lack of understanding about higher education degrees earned through an online program (Allen & Seaman, 2014). The confusion about the degree is problematic and confusing because states can individually determine whether a program is considered an online program (Ozdemir & McDaniel, 2013; Riley, 2013). These individual determinations can affect whether the state will accept the online degree. Employers and academic professionals may prefer tradition programs to online programs (Blumenstyk, 2008; Carnevale, 2007). However, this perception by employers can be mitigated as they learn more about online education and gain understanding of the training received through an online program (Carnevale, 2007). As more employers are increasingly accepting of online programs, they may be more willing to hire students from these programs. Students may worry about how employers perceive their online degree due to the lack of knowledge about online education. However, the more employers know about online education, the more they may be willing to hire people with these types of degrees. Learning about the online environment is one way to start understanding online education.

Online-Learning Environment

Technology is an important component of online learning because different forms of technology help facilitate student learning (McPherson & Bacow, 2015). Traditional classes also help student learning by consistently varying topics and teaching methods. It is difficult and costly to change online instruction at the same rate as traditional classrooms (McPherson & Bacow, 2015). Instructors devoted a large amount of time to developing an online class (Lei & Gupta, 2010).

Time and cost seem to be important factors in the success of an online program. Quinn and Barth (2014) researched online social work programs. They found online students have problems with internship supervision. It is important for students to have appropriate supervision to adequately learn the necessary skills for their chosen field. Professors also experienced a hardship in the cost of traveling to various internship sites (Quinn & Barth, 2014).

In a research study conducted by Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis, and Lopez (2011), the researchers found support was an important factor for students who were taking online classes. Support helps students feel connected to the professor. As an example, students need more interactions with their professor or peers and the opportunity to apply what they had learned to real-life situations or other courses (Lee et al., 2011). Using online learning in real-life scenarios may help foster greater connections to the course material and help students feel confident in applying practical skills.

Reese (2015) recommended that for an online learning environment to be successful, students must actively engage in learning the material. Students can engage in learning through the support of the teacher as well as interactions with classmates (Reese, 2015). Students who participate in online learning may require more self-discipline than in face-to-face classes (Allen

& Seaman, 2014). Self-discipline is important because online classes provide less structure than traditional classes. Reese (2015) also suggested for an online class to be successful online classes must include collaboration, authenticity, and communication between students and faculty members and peer-to-peer (Reese, 2015).

Asynchronous online programs. *Asynchronous learning* means learners participate in an online learning course at different times (Brazina & Ugras, 2014). Historically, online education used asynchronous methods for students to engage in learning. As technology has changed, online programs have changed to begin using synchronous methods to engage students (Watts, 2016).

Synchronous online programs. *Synchronous learning* means learners participate in an online-learning course at the same time but in different locations (Brazina & Ugras, 2014).

Yamagata-Lynch (2014) conducted a self-study of graduate-level students, facilitating asynchronous and synchronous learning through *Blackboard*, an online platform. Synchronous methods had a positive impact on students' feelings of connection (Yamagata-Lynch, 2014).

Parenti (2013) also conducted a study about student perceptions of asynchronous and synchronous Web tools in attainment of academic outcomes. Students preferred to use tools that

allowed for increased interaction between learner and instructor, learner and other learners, learner and content, and learner and technology interface. The strength of these interactions was specifically enhanced by two synchronous tools, *Class Time* and *Chat Pod*, as well as one asynchronous tool, email. (Parenti, 2013, p. 13)

Class Time is an audio–video conferencing software, and *Chat Pod* is instant-messaging software. Students were able to use Web conferencing software to meet synchronously, and instant-messaging software “[allowed] for additional clarification and minimal interruption during class” (Parenti, 2013, p. 13). Students and professors were able to meet and have class using a Web conferencing program and communication through an online-chat system.

In a study about how rapport builds in distance education, researchers identified six indicators: “recognizing the person/individual, supporting and monitoring, availability, accessibility, and responsiveness, non-text-based interactions, tone of interactions, and non-academic conversation/interactions” (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2012, p. 177).

Researchers demonstrated a need for rapport “in distance education because of the absence of face-to-face communication” (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2012, p. 167). Online education may be delivered asynchronously, synchronously, or a blend of the two. Traditionally online education has been delivered asynchronously. However, some researchers presented a case for some synchronous interactions between professors and students and students with other students.

School Counseling

School counselors need specific training to learn to work with students (ASCA, 2005; Milsom & Akos, 2007). CACREP accreditation is the highest accreditation a counseling program can earn. CACREP has specific requirements for the knowledge and skills of a school counselor. With standardized competencies, school counselors across programs may gain a similar school-counselor identity (Milsom & Akos, 2007). Similar training also informs school stakeholders that the school counselor is competent. School counselors must seek certification or licensure from the state where they wish to be employed (Milsom & Akos, 2007). ASCA also provides specific school-counseling standards through a national model.

American School Counseling Association (ASCA) National Model

ASCA (2013) created standards to help give legitimacy to the profession of school counseling and to provide a framework for professional school counselors. The national model recommends each school counselor develop a vision statement, mission statement, and program

goals for the counseling program (ASCA, 2013). School counselors need to create a program that provides for all students (Hatch & Chen-Hayes, 2008). Counseling programs need to address the following three domains: academic, career, and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2013). According to ASCA, a school counseling program's primary focus is student achievement and accomplishment, which is part of the foundation of a school-counseling program (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). The ASCA (2005) national model has four elements: foundation, delivery system, management system, and accountability that guide school counselors' duties.

Foundation. The foundation section guides a school counselor about what needs to be included in the comprehensive school-counseling program (ASCA, 2005). The school counselor develops the philosophy of the program. The philosophy helps “guide the program development, implementation, and evaluation” (ASCA, 2005, p. 22). After developing the philosophy, the counseling program needs a mission statement to describe what the program will do for students. The last part of the foundation section is domains. A school counselor works with all students to support their academic needs, personal/social needs, and career needs (ASCA, 2005).

Delivery system. The delivery system instructs on how to implement the comprehensive guidance program. The school counselor implements the program through school counseling core curriculum, individual-student planning, and responsive services (ASCA, 2012). These components divide into either direct or indirect services. Direct services include working face-to-face with a student. Indirect services indicate when the school counselor is working on the behalf of a student (ASCA, 2012).

School counseling core curriculum is a program developed by the school counselor “that is comprehensive in scope, preventive in nature, and developmental in design” (ASCA, 2012,

p. 85). The curriculum assists students in gaining the “knowledge, attitudes, and skills of student competencies appropriate to the student developmental levels” (ASCA, 2012, p. 85). The school counselor delivers the curriculum through direct instruction, with a team comprising of the school counselor and a teacher, or through group instruction. The school counselor develops group activities outside of the classroom for students based on need (divorce, grief, social skills, or a variety of other topics; ASCA, 2012).

Individual student planning entails a school counselor working one-on-one with a student to reach their future goals. For example, a ninth-grade student may decide they want to attend a military academy upon graduation. The school counselor works directly with the student to create a plan including what academic classes the student needs to take and any testing that would be needed that is part of the academic domain. The school counselor also helps the student connect with a career advisor in the specific branch of the military. Last, the school counselor uses counseling skills to help the student with any personal or social issues that may arise while working toward the student’s postsecondary goal. Responsive services require working with immediate student needs. This encompasses individual “counseling, consultation, referral, peer mediation or information” (ASCA, 2005, p. 22).

Management systems. Management systems possess three components. The first part guides the school counselor on the timeline of their school year. The school counselor develops a calendar and an action plan. An action plan “ensures a plan is in place for how the program intends to reach every student” (ASCA, 2005, p. 23). The management system also includes why it important to have a comprehensive school-counseling program. The reason is clarified through data collected (ASCA, 2005). The last part of the management system explains why the school counselor has the authority to administer the program.

Accountability. Data analysis, program results, and evaluation and improvement are factors in accountability. School counselors use the information gathered to understand how students are affected by the school-counseling program (ASCA, 2005). The school counselor completes a school profile and use-of-time analysis. The school-profile analysis assists the school counselor in understanding how students perform at the school as well as trends that occur at the school (ASCA, 2012). The use-of-time analysis helps the school counselor understand how the counselor's time is allocated (ASCA, 2012). This information contributes to the decision about how to implement the comprehensive guidance curriculum and future program goals (ASCA, 2012).

The program-results report details the effectiveness of the program as well as helps with decision making (ASCA, 2012). The data helps the school counselor have a clear picture of how the program is working. The information also guides school counselors, so they can develop “more focused programing, more effective interventions, and a more responsive school counseling program” (ASCA, 2012, p. 102).

The last part of accountability includes evaluation and improvement. A school counselor self-evaluates individual strengths and areas for improvement. The counselor also completes a self-evaluation of the counseling program. After the self-reflection, an administrator evaluates the school counselor. The school counselor reviews completed evaluations for counseling-program goals (ASCA, 2012).

Accountability standards help evaluate the school counselors' performance and the ability to conduct a program audit. The standards guide the school counselor to know what is expected of them (ASCA, 2005). The program audit helps in understanding how the school counselor is using the ASCA National Model (2005) and sets the standard for future practice.

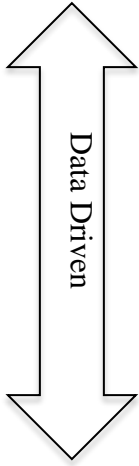
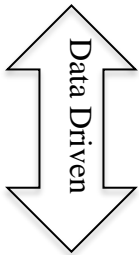
School-Counselor Role

ASCA definition of the role of school counselors is described below:

Certified/licensed educators with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling, making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academic, career, and social/development needs by designing, implementing, evaluating and enhancing a comprehensive school counseling program that promotes and enhances student success. (2013, para. "The Role of a School Counselor para. 1)

This role has changed and been refined throughout its history (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). As society changes, the requirements of a school counselor must be redefined. School counselors are asked to be more accountable for their time and their role in the school than in the past (Gysbers, 2004). The ASCA National Model third edition (2012) recommends the school counselor to student ratio should be 1:250 and that 80% or more of the school counselor's time be spent completing direct student services that include "school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services" (p. 136) or indirect student services, which include "referrals, consultation, or collaboration" (ASCA, 2012, p. 136). The other 20% of the school counselor's time allocated to system-support duties such as program management and operations, professional development, data analysis, or fair-share responsibilities. Direct and indirect student services support the needs of all students. Table 1 shows the difference between the two delivery methods (ASCA, 2012). Table 1 depicts how student services are separated into categories and which duties are considered direct or indirect. It also emphasizes the importance of working with all students and using data to identify students who may need extra support. The method column explains with whom the school counselor interacts in completing student-service tasks.

Table 1
Delivery Component

Item	Elements and Strategies	Recipient	Method
Direct student services	School Counseling Core Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction • Group Activities Individual Student Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appraisal • Advisement Responsive Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling 	All students 	Interactions with students in: Large group Classroom Small group Individual
Indirect student services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis Response • Referrals • Consultation 	Identified students All students 	Interactions with others
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration 	Identified students	

Note. Adapted from *The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs* (3rd ed.), by American School Counselor Association, 2012, Alexandria, VA: Author, p. 84)

Comprehensive Counseling Program

School counselors' first priority is the students at their school. To best serve their students, school counselors need to have a comprehensive guidance program. ASCA (2005) stated that the benefits students experience through the program include the following:

- Ensuring every student receives the benefit of the school counseling program by designing content curriculum for every student,

- Monitoring data to facilitate student improvement,
- Providing strategies for closing the achievement gap because some students need more,
- Promoting a rigorous academic curriculum for every student,
- Ensuring equitable access to educational opportunities,
- Fostering advocacy for students and,
- Supporting development of skills to increase student success (ASCA, 2005).

Students benefit because school counselors focus on helping them be as successful as possible.

It is especially important that all students benefit from the counseling program. School counselors can promote the need for a comprehensive school-counseling program by demonstrating the benefits it provides for students as they create interventions based on achievement gaps, create and implement interventions, and share the data from this process.

Comprehensive counseling programs include goals for improving student academic achievement but must also include objectives for personal and career development (Brown & Trusty, 2005). If a school counselor has a comprehensive program, they have a holistic approach to working with students that includes all three domains: academic, career, and personal/social. Elementary school counselors need more training in the academic and career domains (Dahir et al., 2009). This may be the result of an emphasis on navigating interpersonal and social milestones at this developmental stage, rather than on academic achievement and career planning.

For a school counselor to be as effective as possible, they need to have a comprehensive school-counseling program. Therefore, thorough training, specific to how to write, implement, and evaluate the school-counseling program is crucial to be an effective professional school

counselor. This training can be obtained through a CACREP-accredited program. The CACREP and ASCA standards guide programs to effectively educate school-counseling students.

Most school counselors do not receive appropriate training for the development of a “comprehensive school counseling program, program development, implementation, and accountability” (Dahir, Burnham, & Stone, 2009, p. 183), though ASCA (2012) promotes this best-practice model. School counselors who lack knowledge of how to develop a comprehensive program are not adequately serving their students.

Counselor Education

Relationships are important when educating counselors. Smith (2011) reported “it is common to hear how a positive interpersonal relationship with a teacher or tutor had a profound effect on a person’s enjoyment of a particular school or college subject and perhaps also on his or her mastery of it” (p. 233). Counseling training includes learning facts and theoretical concepts and learning how to apply these facts and concepts to real-life events. To learn to use counseling skills, students participate in role-playing skills, receiving feedback, and getting supervision (Smith, 2011). Counseling programs encourage students to self-explore and enhance personal development (Chui, Ziemer, Palma, & Hill, 2014; Smith, 2011). When students are involved in self-exploration, they may be more aware of their relationships with their peers (Chui et al., 2014). Students fully participate in learning environments when they feel safe and supported (Smith, 2011). This environment is created through a positive relationship between the student and professor, impacting the learning experience (Boswell, Wilson, Stark, & Onwuegbuzie, 2015; Smith, 2011). Positive relationships are helpful because students are willing to participate more, thereby deepening their level of learning (Chui et al., 2014).

Relationships in counselor education also take the form of mentoring between professor and student or professor and professor. Students may be open to explore new opportunities and experiences because a mentor provided the necessary information (Boswell et al., 2015). In the mentor–mentee relationship, mentees reported that feedback was an important part of the relationship because it helped with growth and development (Boswell et al., 2015).

Relationships are important to the art of counseling, whether mental health counseling or school counseling. Relationships are especially important for school counselors when they are completing responsive services, such as individual or group counseling. Due to growing popularity of online programs, it is essential to research them especially to understand the importance of relationships, interpersonal awareness, and disposition.

Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)

Counseling programs are generally divided into two tracks: school counseling or mental health counseling. The highest accreditation for a counseling program is through CACREP. There are the 261 CACREP accredited school-counseling programs in the United States (CACREP, 2018b). Of these 261, 19 are online programs. The University of Louisiana at Monroe received accreditation in 1989, which is the earliest online program with a CACREP accreditation (CACREP, 2018b). Online CACREP accredited programs take place at Adams State University, Bradley University, Capella University, College of William and Mary, Gallaudet University, Indiana Wesleyan University, Liberty University-School of Behavioral Sciences, Messiah College, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, Regent University, St. Bonaventure University, University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of Houston Victoria, University of Louisiana at Monroe, University of North Carolina at Pembroke, Wake Forest University, and Walden

University (CACREP, 2018b). CACREP was officially created in 1981 (Schmidt, 1999), independent from other organizations. However, it does have close ties with the American Counseling Association (Schmidt, 1999).

CACREP has a specific vision, mission, and core values. The vision is to “provide leadership and to promote excellence in professional preparation” (CACREP, 2018a, “Vision, Mission, and Core Values” para. 1). This vision guides the standards created by CACREP. The mission of CACREP is to promote professional competence, fostered “through the development of preparation standards; the encouragement of excellence in program development; and the accreditation of professional preparation programs” (CACREP, 2018a, para “Vision, Mission, and Core Values, para. 5). The CACREP board developed the core values to support the vision and mission. The values demonstrate continued commitment to leadership and excellence (CACREP, 2018a). In regard to school counseling programs, CACREP has the following standards for counselor education programs. The standards are in three categories: foundations, contextual dimensions, and practice (CACREP, 2018c). Below in table 2 is a sample of the standards from the CACREP website (CACREP, 2018c).

Table 2

CACREP School Counseling Standards

	Standard
Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • history and development of school counseling • models of school counseling programs • models of P-12 comprehensive career development
Contextual Dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school counselor roles as leaders, advocates, and systems change agents in P-12 schools • competencies to advocate for school counseling roles • characteristics, risk factors, and warning signs of students at risk for mental health and behavioral disorders • signs and symptoms of substance abuse in children and adolescents as well as the signs and symptoms of living in a home where substance use occurs • qualities and styles of effective leadership in schools • community resources and referral sources • legal and ethical considerations specific to school counseling
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • development of school counseling program mission statements and objectives • design and evaluation of school counseling programs • core curriculum design, lesson plan development, classroom management strategies, and differentiated instructional strategies • interventions to promote academic development • use of developmentally appropriate career counseling interventions and assessments • techniques of personal/social counseling in school settings • techniques to foster collaboration and teamwork within schools • use of data to advocate for programs and students

Online School-Counseling Programs

Due to the rigor and standards associated with CACREP-accredited programs, this study focused only on graduates of the online accredited programs mentioned previously. To maintain accreditation, counseling programs may only hire counselor educators who are graduates of a CACREP program. Counseling programs can be independent schools or housed in a larger university. The requirements for the different programs have some variations but all maintain CACREP standards.

Chapter III: Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret participants' experiences of being trained and graduating from a CACREP online school-counseling master's program and determine how their training prepared them for their current role as a school counselor. To better understand online education and how it prepares school counselors, participants shared stories of their experiences of online education through one-on-one interviews. Participants' narratives were used to answer the following research questions. How do school counselors describe and make meaning of their experience of an online program? and How do the school counselors describe how their online experience prepared them to work in their current positions? This chapter contains the rationale for the use of a qualitative method and how narrative inquiry was used. This chapter describes in detail the conceptual framework that guided the development of the interview protocol, an overview of the participants and how the researcher recruited them, the research design, data-collection and analysis processes, and trustworthiness.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative researchers focus on "processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). They emphasize how and why something happened. Qualitative researchers focus on how people create reality and the context in which the participants live (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The research environment is equally as important as the participants. Narrative research is one type of qualitative research.

Rationale for Narrative Inquiry

Researchers use narrative inquiry in qualitative research to focus on the stories told by people about their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). This type of inquiry is used "to make sense of life as lived" (p. 78), and narratives are "the best way of representing and understanding

experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18). In this research study, participant narratives are used to best understand online education from student perspectives. It “is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single individual or the lives of a small number of individuals (Creswell, 2013, p. 73). Narrative inquiry is about the “stories that create the effect of reality” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744). Therefore, a person creates a personal reality through telling stories.

Experience itself does not have meaning (Sheperis, Young, & Daniels, 2010). Meaning is constructed by reflecting. A person must first have an experience, and then reflect on it to truly understand how the experience impacted them. Each participant created personal meaning through the telling of their stories.

By using narrative inquiry, a researcher can uncover information that other types of inquiry cannot because “narratives and stories reveal and communicate our human experiences, our social structures, and how we make sense of the world” (Patton, 2015, p. 131). When people tell their stories, they are communicating their personal experiences and the impact these experiences had on them. The art of storytelling is a powerful tool in understanding people.

To understand school counselors’ experiences of earning a master’s degree from an online program, the researcher asked them to tell the story of their training. By telling these stories, school counselors were able to reflect on their experiences. As participants told their stories, they created meaning. The narratives were important to the research because the stories represented the people’s experiences.

The second part of each participant’s narrative was to understand how online training prepared them for their positions as professional school counselors. Upon reflecting on their

training, participants may have gained a deeper understanding of how they were prepared or unprepared for the duties of a school counselor.

Conceptual Framework

The researcher used a conceptual framework because it is “the conceptual link between the research problem, the literature, and the methodology selected” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 124). The researcher created the conceptual framework to guide the review of related literature connected to online education and school counseling. Although the framework did not include all aspects of the literature, it is how the researcher framed the study.

Online education started as correspondence courses that began in the 18th and 19th centuries (Holmberg, 2008). As of 2012, 7.1 million students in the United States reported taking at least one online course through an institution of higher education, and the number of students taking online courses is continuing to grow (Allen & Seaman, 2014; Riley, 2013; Saba, 2005). Online programs are gaining in popularity, but programs have yet to offer evidence of their efficacy (Beaudoin, 2016).

Little research has been conducted to describe online programs that offer a school-counselor master’s degree, and the need for school counseling programs may be increasing. There is legislation that impact the need for more school counselors to serve students such as providing more funding and reducing the counselor to student ratio (ASCA, 2018).

The focus of this study was on participants’ narratives about online education and how it prepared them to be school counselors. To understand participants’ narratives and how they created meaning of their lived experiences, the researcher used a social-constructionism lens. Each participant had a unique and individual perspective about online training, which helped explain the inferences drawn from the narratives given.

Social Constructionism

People create identity in the context of their environment. “Everything we are, do, think, feel, experience, and so on exists against the backdrop of cultural characteristics and within a social milieu” (Luke, 2016, p. 7). People construct knowledge based on historical information (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism is a lens used to understand how people create their reality. In this lens, “truth” is a “matter of shared meanings and consensus among a group of people” (Patton, 2015, p. 121). People need other people to help them create their truth and reality because it is through their interactions that they create their understanding of reality (Burr, 2015).

Social constructionism has the premise that people cannot be truly objective (Burr, 2015). Objectivity is impossible because people process everything seen or heard through their individual perspective. People can view the same event and have a different perspective of it. Their own histories influence their understanding of what happened (Burr, 2015). Reality is constructed through a person’s individual perspective.

Language is an element of social constructionism (Burr, 2015). Language is more than merely the act of expression. “Language has practical consequences for people that should be acknowledged” (Burr, 2015, p. 11). Language has meaning because people connect meaning to words and statements. Statements carry the power to create consequences (Burr, 2015). Consequences may include contracts that are legally binding. For example, a marriage ceremony contains socially constructed statements that have powerful meanings. Language is also important to expressing the narrative of a lived experience.

By using a social constructionist lens, the researcher accepted the idea that each person has an individual reality (Patton, 2015). Each participant’s unique reality guided the researcher’s understanding of online school counselor education. Through this lens, the researcher

constructed meaning through the interpretation of participants' stories of online training (see Figure 1).

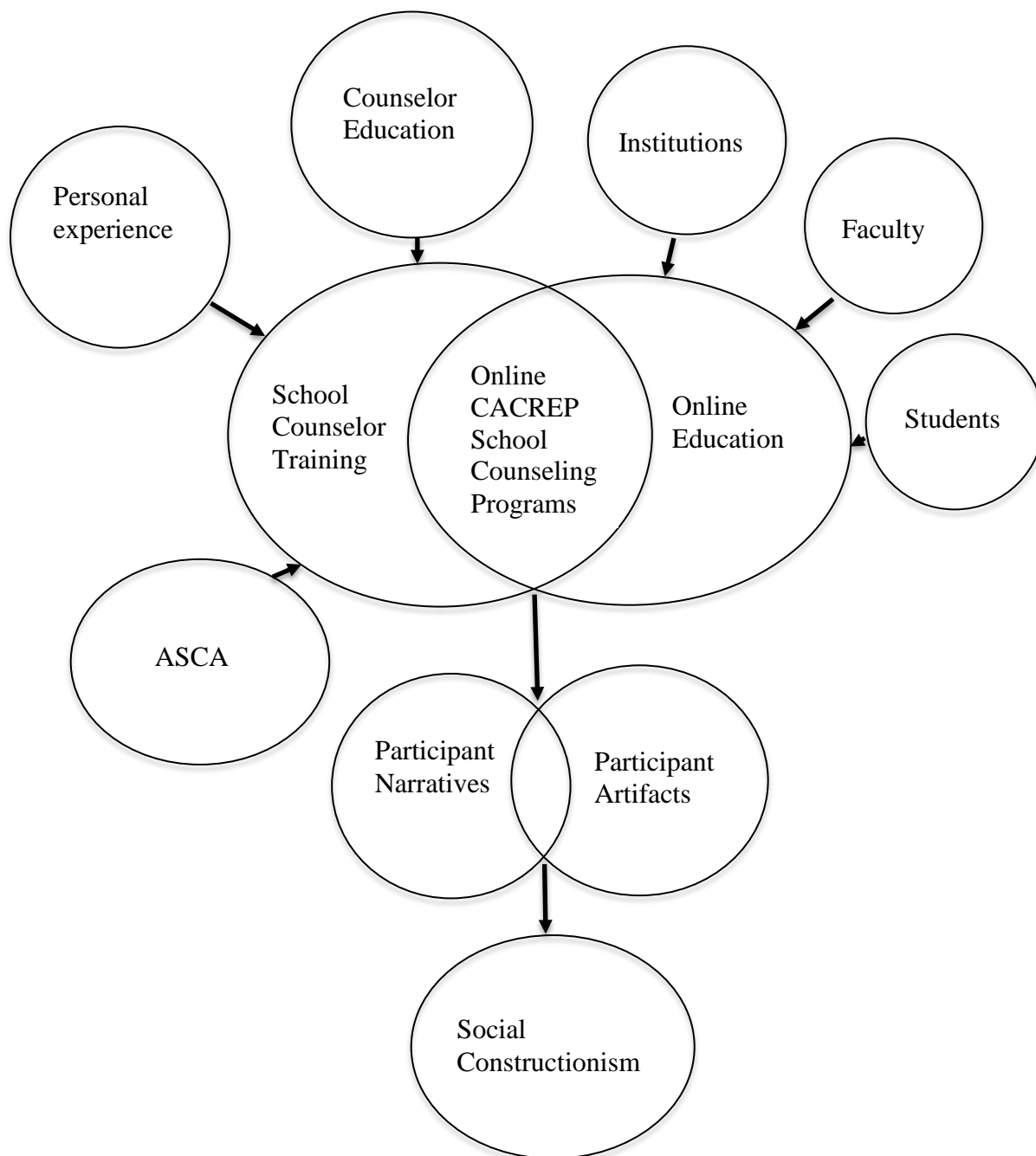


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Assumptions in the Conceptual Framework

The idea for this research study began out of curiosity. The researcher identifies as professional school counselor and plans to work as a counselor educator. The researcher wanted to understand how school counselors are trained specifically in relation to online programs. As a person who has been trained and has worked as a school counselor, the researcher had some assumptions about how participants would describe their training and how it prepared them to be school counselors. First, the researcher expected participants to explain how ASCA standards were taught in their programs and how the use of ASCA prepared them for the role and duties of being a school counselor. Second, the researcher's training was in a face-to-face program. The researcher expected some differences to emerge about how participants explained how they learned the knowledge and skills necessary to be a school counselor.

Participants

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher focuses on “describing, understanding, and clarifying the human experience” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139). The selection of participants was purposeful instead of random (Polkinghorne, 2005). The researcher specifically recruited participants and allowed them to participate in the research study because of their potential to contribute a narrative to due to their experience of being trained through an online school-counseling program with a CACREP accreditation. Therefore, the researcher assumed the participants who graduated from these programs were competent in the CACREP school counselor standards previously discussed in Chapter Two. A random selection may provide participants who are inappropriate for the research study. According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), “the more similar participants in a sample are in their experience with respect to the research domain, the sooner we would expect to reach saturation” (p. 76). Saturation was

reached with six participants due to the similarities in narratives. The researcher did not recruit more participants because she did not expect someone to have a vastly different narrative.

Demographics and Eligibility

School counselor. To be included in the research study, participants met specific criteria. First, the person must be a school counselor in a K–12 school. The focus of the study was on school counselors, their training, and their current roles in schools. Therefore, participants were school counselors in a school setting to have the experience needed for the research study. School counselors must have had at least 1 complete year of experience at the current work site. This criterion was meant to account for the learning curve of a new position. A first-year school counselor works to understand the school and the expectations of the position. After the first year, the school counselor may be more comfortable in her role and better reflect about how her training prepared her for the responsibilities and duties of a school counselor.

Online master's program. Participants must also have earned a master's degree in school counseling from a 100% online program with a current CACREP accreditation. In online programs, people participate in classes that are Web-based with minimal face-to-face contact. Minimal face-to-face contact means taking online classes but participating in weekend or week-long seminars required by their program. The focus of this study was to better understand online programs and how they train school counselors. It is important that the online programs be as similar as possible to be able to draw valid and reliable conclusions; therefore, the criteria included a 100% online program with CACREP accreditation.

Additional training. School counselors are required to participate in professional development to keep their certification or license current. Therefore, they were not excluded for

having undertaken additional training such as conferences or seminars. This criterion allowed school counselors who received additional training through conferences and seminars to meet licensing requirements and be included in the study. Also, school counselors must have continuing education after they graduated from their online program. Continuing education may influence how they conduct their role as school counselors.

Selection Procedures and Recruitment

The researcher sent a participant request e-mail through the Counselor Education and Supervision NETwork-Listserv (CESNET-L). CESNET-L is an e-mail forum of mental health professionals that includes school counselors, counselor educators, and other people connected to the mental health field. An example of the e-mail appears in Appendix A. The researcher contacted administrators of online CACREP school-counseling programs about sending information to their students. The e-mail to the schools were similar to the letter sent on CESNET-L. A copy of the letter appears in Appendix B. Last, the researcher e-mailed state school-counseling associations about sending the dissertation recruitment letter to professional school counselors who are members of the state school-counseling association. A copy of the letter is in Appendix C.

Participants included in the study had a story to tell about earning an online school-counseling master's degree from a CACREP-accredited program and are also currently work as school counselors. These participants were accepted into the research study because they were able to tell a story about being trained online, and how it prepared them to be school counselors (Creswell, 2013; Sheperis et al., 2010).

Research Design

The research questions for this particular study are: How do school counselors describe and make meaning of their experience of an online program? How do the school counselors describe how their online experience prepared them to work in their current positions? Maxwell (2013) stated “your research questions—what you specifically want to understand by doing your study—are at the heart of your research design” (p. 4). These questions served as a guide to attain the purpose of this study, which was to understand the narrative of participant’s experiences who attended an online program and how the training translated to their practice as school counselors. The following list summarizes the research design:

1. A literature review was conducted to better understand online education from an institution, faculty, and student perspective as well as literature about school counselors and counselor education.
2. A dissertation proposal was defended and approved by the dissertation committee.
3. The university’s institutional review board approved the research study after reviewing the institutional-review-board protocol, which described data-collection procedures including informed consent, data collection, and contacting and interviewing participants.
4. Recruiting began by contacting state school-counseling associations, individual online school-counseling programs with a CACREP accreditation, and through a counseling Listserv called CESNET-L. Upon volunteering, participants received the informed consent to review and sign.

5. Semistructured interviews were conducted using Zoom. The time-task analysis was explained at the end of the interview. The time-task analysis would be completed by participants and artifacts that would be collected.
6. Follow-up interviews were conducted within 60 days of the first interview for member-checking purposes.

Data-Collection Procedures

The research had specific protocols about how the data were collected. The procedures also stated how the data were protected to maintain participants' confidentiality. Below will describe the procedures that were taken during the study.

Informed consent. The researcher provided the informed-consent form, found in Appendix E, to participants with information about the study. The informed consent helped participants understand the purpose of the study, possible risks and discomforts, and potential benefits from participating in the study. Once a person e-mailed the researcher to volunteer, she responded to ensure the participant met the inclusion criteria and sent the informed-consent form, asking each participant to review the form. Once the person reviewed the informed-consent form, the participant signed it and e-mailed it back to the researcher. Then, the researcher and participant scheduled an interview day and time. Prior to starting each interview, the researcher reviewed the informed-consent form with the participant to ensure understanding and agreement.

Data collection. Data collection included all information needed to produce trustworthy research conclusions. The data accrued throughout the research process in three stages: prior to interviewing participants, during interactions with the participants, and during data analysis, which produced new information. Table 2 presents the different types of data needed, the data that emerged, and the source of that data for each research question.

Table 3
Data Collection

Research question	Type of information needed	Information yielded	Method of data collection
Research Question 1	Contextual	Program description	Program website
Research Question 1	Demographic	Age, gender, K–12 school	Participant demographic questionnaire
Research Question 1	Perceptual	Participants' attitudes, perceptions, ideas, thoughts, perceptions	Participant interview view artifacts [favorite class syllabus, favorite assignment]
Research Question 2	Contextual	School counselors' job description	School website School counseling handbook School board information Participant interview
Research Question 2	Demographic	School description	School website State Department of Education statistics
Research Question 2	Perceptual	Participants' attitudes, ideas, thoughts, perceptions	Participant interviews artifacts [time task analysis, comprehensive guidance curriculum]

Stage 1: The data collected prior to meeting with the participants represented contextual information. Contextual information was material about the online program where they earned their master's degree. Knowing about the participant's alma mater helped to understand their context. Part of developing credibility with participants and the study was to have prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement will be detailed later in this chapter.

Stage 2: The second part of collecting data was during interactions with participants in interviews. Interviews is when the participant was able tell their narrative and create meaning about their lived experience. During the initial 60–90-minute semistructured interview, the

researcher asked participants for demographic information. Demographic information helped in understanding their individual perceptions as participants divulged some background knowledge about their program and their current school-counseling position.

During the initial and follow-up interviews, the researcher collected perceptual data. These data included descriptions of the online program. Through telling their narrative, participants revealed information pertaining to why they chose to pursue a degree from an online program, their attitudes about the program, and a variety of other perceptions.

Stage 3: After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed to create data and the transcripts were coded to create more data. The researcher triangulated the codes with other artifacts collected. The artifacts about the CACREP online program included syllabi from a favorite class and an assignment from a class. An artifact from the school setting was a time-task analysis. A time-task analysis is a document in which the school counselor records how much time they spent completing their school-counseling duties.

Triangulation aided in establishing the credibility of the study. Participants completed member checks through Zoom to confirm their narratives were accurately represented. Prior to the follow-up interview, the researcher sent the transcript of the initial interview to the participant. The e-mail directed the participant to review the transcript for accuracy. At the beginning of the follow-up interview, the researcher asked if the participant had reviewed the transcript and if they needed to add or change any of the text.

Data Protection

The researcher protected all collected data to ensure participants' confidentiality. Interviews were recorded on Zoom, which is a Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)-approved device. The audio recordings were transcribed and then deleted. The

researcher kept transcripts on a password-protected computer to which only the researcher had access. Transcripts had all identifying information removed. Any written document had any identifying participant information such as names, work places, and the name of the online CACREP school-counseling program removed to protect the identity of the person and the program. The researcher used pseudonyms to write about participants. The deletion of identifying information and the use of pseudonyms protected participants' confidentiality.

Contact and Interview Process

Participants recruited through an online listserv were instructed to contact the researcher at her university e-mail address. Once the person e-mailed the researcher to volunteer, she sent the informed-consent through e-mail for them to review. Participants had an opportunity to ask questions about the purpose of the study and their specific role before consenting or declining to participate in the study.

The researcher contacted school-counseling faculty members to inquire about e-mailing information about the research study to prior students. The researcher included the informed-consent in the e-mail that was sent to students who had graduated from the online program. Once a professional school counselor agreed to be part of the study, the participant and the researcher scheduled an interview. If it was not possible to meet in person for the interviews, they took place through Zoom, which is HIPAA-compliant video-conferencing software.

The researcher reviewed the informed-consent form with participants prior to beginning the initial interview. It was important for them to understand the potential risks and benefits of participating. Participants had an opportunity to understand their role in the study and ask any questions prior to beginning their involvement in the research study. Participation was voluntary; therefore, they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Analysis

The researcher collected narratives through interviews and analyzed the data inductively. This process allowed for “discovering patterns, themes, and categories” (Patton, 2015, p. 542). The researcher read and coded each participant’s interview seeking themes. Inductive coding was appropriate for this research study because no framework already exists to guide the analysis of the data. Because this is new research, it was important to be open to all possible themes that may have arisen.

When the researcher analyzed participants’ stories, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of “cultural and social meanings” (Patton, 2015, p. 128). Narrative inquiry helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of the meaning people assign their experiences. Meanings emerged through the stories participants told. The researcher interviewed participants to learn their stories about being trained through an online program and how that training translated into practice. Through these stories, participants revealed the meaning attached to their lived experiences. Little was known about online school-counseling programs and how they prepare school counselors. Narrative inquiry helped discover what it means to be trained through this method and how the participants perceive they were prepared to be a professional school counselor.

Transcribing and Interpreting

The researcher conducted interviews with the participants. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed. The transcript helped in a variety of ways. The transcript of the participants’ narratives helped with creating meaning through the interpretation of the narratives in written form (Patton, 2015). The transcripts were also helpful in the presentation of data and minimizing researcher bias because they contained participants’ quotations. These

quotations will be presented in Chapter Four to offer support for the themes (Mays & Pope, 1995).

The researcher conducted an initial interview with participants lasting 60–90 minutes. After the interview was conducted, it was transcribed and analyzed for themes. After themes emerged, the researcher conducted a second 30-minute interview to serve as a member check, which the researcher also transcribed and interpreted to enhance the data.

Analyzing the Data

After the initial interviews were transcribed, the coding process began. Esin, Fathi, and Squire (2014) stated “narrative analysis is an analytical method that accommodates a variety of approaches” (p. 203). The process used was similar to a coding process created by Strauss and Corbin as described by Brogatti (2005). The stages are described below.

The first step of coding the data was understanding emerging categories. Categories developed based on the interview questions. The researcher separated the interview protocol into two sections. The first section had questions about participants’ online education experience; the second was about being a school counselor. Table 4 shows the categories for the two sections.

Table 4
Data Categories

Online-education categories	School-counselor categories
Reasons for attending an online program	Role as a school counselor
Description of program including likes, dislikes, and changes	Typical Day
Interactions with professors	Counselor duties including classroom guidance and responsive services
Interactions with peers	School counseling domains: including academic, personal/social, and career
Counseling skills	Online preparation
Practicum and internships	

After categories emerged, the researcher read each interview and identified key words and phrases from each participant interview for each category. These key words and phrases became the open codes for each category. A sample of a category and the open codes from that category appears in Figure 2.

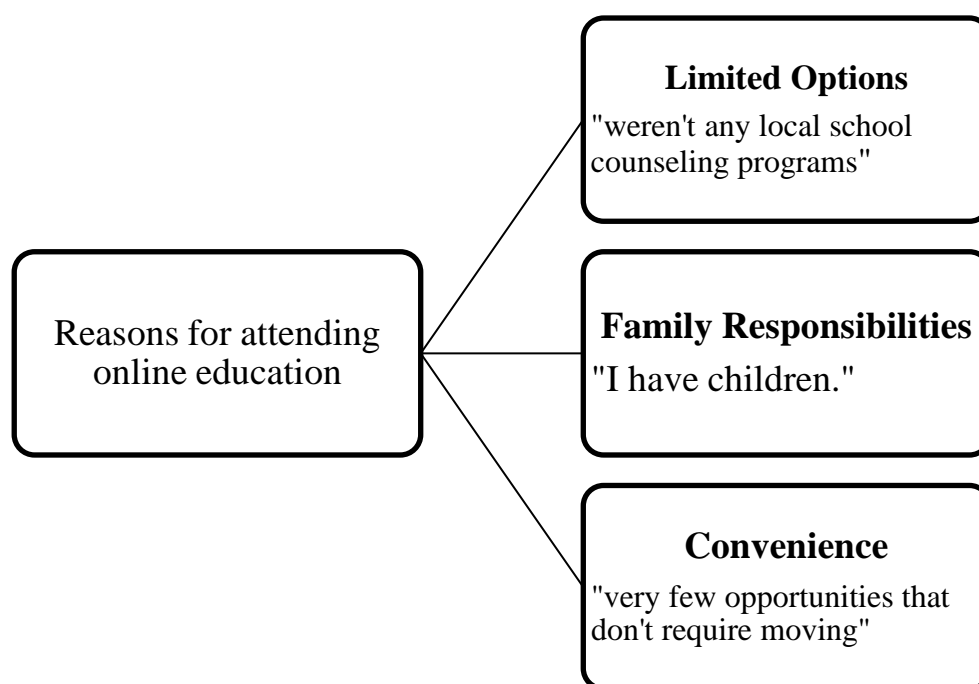


Figure 2. Sampling of codes related to category of reasons for attending online education.

After reading through the interviews and reviewing the open codes that emerged, the researcher analyzed the open codes to develop axial codes. The axial codes of reasons for attending online education included geographic limitations and lifestyle factors. Figure 3 demonstrates the flow from category to axial code.

After axial coding for each category, selective codes emerged. The selective codes developed from the axial codes of geographical limitations and lifestyle factors was access to higher education (see Figure 4). The researcher completed this process for each category. Once all of the selective codes emerged, the themes became apparent within the data. The themes that

answer Research Question 1 were access to higher education, interpersonal relationships (student to professor and student to student), student diversity, and independent learning. These themes provided information about how students described and made meaning about their experience of an online program.

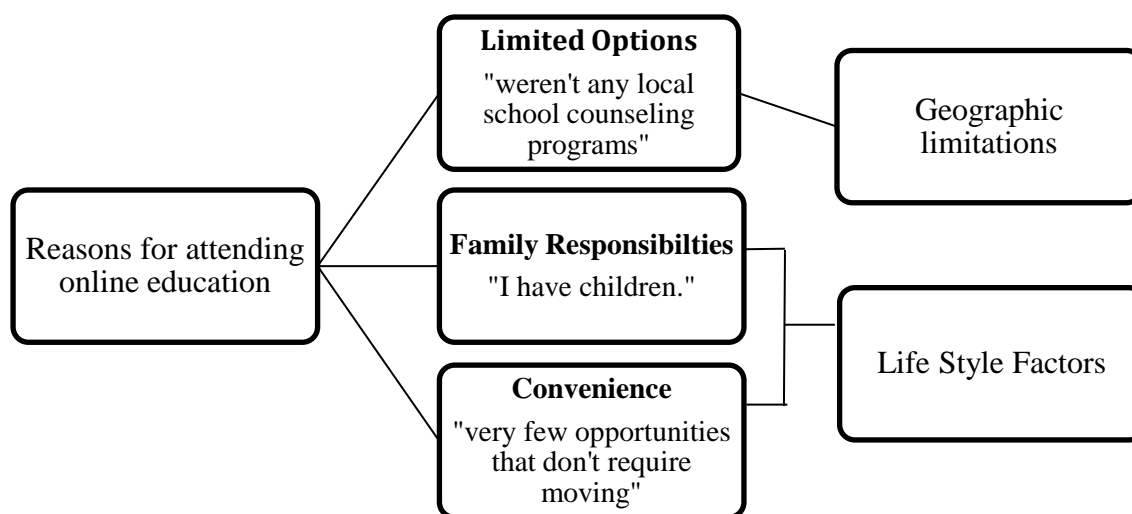


Figure 3. Example of flow from category to axial codes.

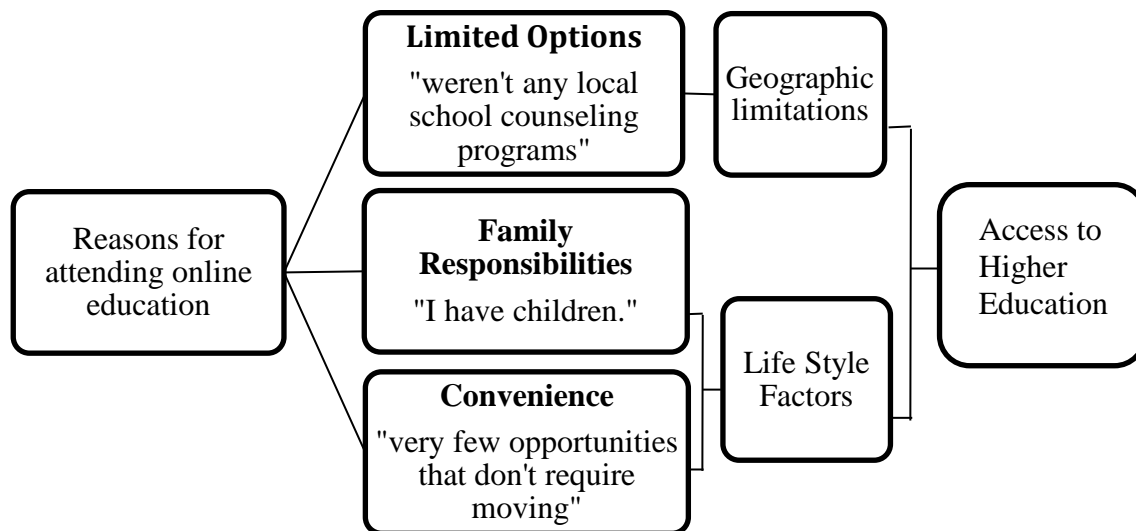


Figure 4. Example of flow to selective codes.

When coding the school-counseling categories, participants described their individual context. They explained what they needed from their online program depended on the school-counseling position. Therefore, the theme that developed was perceived preparedness for the school-counseling position.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness signifies that the research conducted has the rigor necessary to be credible and dependable. In this study, the researcher demonstrated trustworthiness through the strategies of credibility, transferability, and dependability. These three areas were important parts of the research methods to ensure the conclusions drawn are an accurate representation of the data collected.

Credibility

The first step in creating credibility was using an appropriate research method for the study. The researcher established credibility in the study using “prolonged engagement,

persistent [engagement], and triangulation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). These three activities help with the credibility of the research findings.

Prolonged engagement. Before entering the school-counseling environment, it was vital to establish baseline knowledge about participants’ school-counseling environments. The researcher used this information to begin understanding the participants context. Prolonged engagement meant spending time learning about the environment and context being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Engagement began when participants contacted the researcher to participate in the study. Participants stated which online program they attended. Before interviewing participants, the researcher investigated the online CACREP program where the school counselor earned a master’s degree. It was important to know the demographics of the school to aid in understanding participants’ experience in these programs.

After spending time learning about the context of the online program, the researcher entered the environment to conduct interviews and artifact collection. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated the researcher also needs to be accepted into the environment to be able to gain an accurate understanding. If the researcher was not accepted into the environment, a possibility could arise for distortions, which diminish the credibility of the research being conducted. To be accepted into the environment, the author must have prolonged engagement and build trust with participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher was accepted into participants’ environments at the time of the initial interview. During this time, they shared their narratives. After the initial interview, engagement continued through e-mail until all member checks and data was accrued. The researcher started engaging with participants and their environment as soon as they agreed to be part of the research study. Involvement continued until after completing member checks. Each participant received a minimum of three e-mails: scheduling

the initial interview, sending the time-task analysis and directions, and scheduling the follow-up interview. Some participants had more communication if they had questions about the time-task analysis or needed reminders to send back the time-task analysis or artifacts. Participants also had an initial interview and follow-up interview. The initial interview lasted 60-90 minutes. The follow-up interview was scheduled within 60 days of the initial interview and lasted about 30 minutes. The researcher spent time learning about each online program as well as the schools where the participants worked as professional school counselors, which meets the requirements of prolonged engagement. The researcher explains how she could improve prolonged engagement in Chapter 5.

Persistent engagement. “Prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent [engagement] provides depth” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). With persistent engagement, the researcher spent enough time in the environment to have a deeper understanding of participants’ contexts. Enough time is defined by the purpose and need of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research study, persistent engagement was determined as spending enough time with the participants to have an understanding of each narrative which then became the themes represented in Chapter Four.

To begin understanding each narrative, the researcher scheduled an initial interview which allowed participants to tell their story. When scheduling the initial interview, the researcher began asking about basic demographic information such as which online program the participant attended. The researcher and participant had an email conversation that began with the participant initially volunteering and continued through scheduling the initial interview, and then sending out the time-task analysis and information about other artifacts that would be collected. Another email conversation was started for scheduling the follow-up interview and

the participants sending back their time-task analysis and artifacts. Email communication continued after the initial interview to ensure participants understood the time-task analysis and artifacts that were collected. While most communication occurred over email, one participant called the researcher to ask about the time-task analysis.

During the first interview, the researcher and participant discussed the informed-consent form, and the researcher explained the participant's role in the research study. Once the person agreed to be part of the study, the researcher collected information about the school counselor's online program and scheduled a time for the interview. The first interview lasted 60-90 minutes. After the interview, the interviews were transcribed. Once the initial interview data was coded and artifacts sent, a member check occurred within 60 days in the form of a follow-up interview. During the follow-up interview, the researcher ensured the transcripts accurately represented participants' narratives. Persistent engagement was important when "identifying and assessing salient factors and crucial atypical happenings" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 307). As previously stated, the amount of time needed for persistent engagement depends on the purpose and need of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher attempted to be persistently engaged with participants primarily through email. Table 5 illustrates the type of communication between participant and researcher, how often, and the time span of engagement.

Table 5
Persistent Engagement Information

Name of Participant	Number of communications	Time frame of engagement
Larry	33 emails 2 face-to-face interviews	March 20, 2017 to September 16, 2017
Kathy	44 emails 2 face-to-face interviews 1 phone conversation	April 12, 2017 to September 16, 2017
Brian	21 emails 1 face-to-face email	April 9, 2017 to October 19, 2017
Rachel	16 emails 1 face-to-face interview 1 text conversation	May 8, 2017 to January 30, 2018
Ann	46 emails 1 face-to-face interview	May 6, 2017 to October 19, 2017
Craig	31 emails 3 face-to-face interviews	November 5, 2017 To January 15, 2018

As shown in this table, all participants and the researcher communicated through a number of emails. The number of emails varied based on scheduling, questions from the participant or researcher, and sending the artifacts collected. Craig has three face-to-face interviews because his initial interview did not record the first time and the researcher had to schedule another face-to-face meeting to conduct the initial interview. The researcher and Rachel had a text conversation about Rachel completing her follow-up interview, sending her time-task analysis and artifacts. Rachel was not able to complete these items because she was on maternity leave. Even though, three participants (Brian, Ann, and Rachel) did not complete a follow-up interview or send all necessary artifacts. The researcher continued to reach out to the

participants to complete the follow-up interview and gather all artifacts. The three participants stopped responding to the researcher's emails. Although they stopped responding to the researcher, they completed enough of the requirements for their narratives to be included in the emerging themes. For the purpose of this exploratory study, the researcher was persistently engaged with participants to gather information about their online program and how it prepared them to be professional school counselors. Overall, the researcher had persistent engagement because enough time was spent to understand the participants' narratives. However, the persistent engagement could be improved. The suggestions for improvement are explained in Chapter Five.

Triangulation. The researcher collected interviews along with other artifacts, such as assignments and syllabi from participants' classes and also a time-task analysis. The researcher used these artifacts as a form of triangulation. Triangulation helped safeguard the themes created and ensured the data collected were accurately represented (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2015) stated triangulation confirms data is represented accurately across all modes of data. As the researcher drew conclusions about the data presented, the researcher needed to verify that the conclusions were supported by multiple data sources. In this study, triangulation comprised two sets of face-to-face video interviews with participants and artifacts presented (Patton, 2015; Shenton, 2004).

Interviews. To collect participant narratives, the author conducted an initial semistructured interview lasting 60-90 minutes. During the interviews, participants answered demographic questions about the online program they attended and about their experience as a school counselor, as well as open-ended questions about their online program and their school-

counseling position. Participants also completed a follow-up interview to review the transcript from the initial interview, clarify information, and review developing themes.

Artifacts. Participants also provided artifacts: assignments from their classes, syllabi from classes, and a time-task analysis. Assignments from a class provided information about the type of work required. The syllabi offered insight into how the class was conducted. Participants filled out the time-task analysis, providing insight into how the school counselor spent their time. These artifacts were used to support the interviews.

Member checks. Member checks served several purposes. It was ensuring the transcript accurately reflected their story (Fraser, 2004). If the transcription was not accurate, it would need to be corrected. The researcher also checked the transcripts to understand the intentionality of the story being told (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was important to understand participants' intentions behind a particular story because the intentions can impact the conclusions drawn (Shenton, 2004). Member checking allowed participants an opportunity to provide more information. They may have recalled additional information that was not included in the original interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also described emerging themes with the participants.

Prior to the second interview, the author e-mailed the initial transcript to the participant for review. This interview served as a time to ask follow-up questions, clarify any information given in the original interview, and review developing themes. Continual member checking “offer[s] a goodness of fit of findings and interpretations as they emerge” (Sheperis et al., 2010, p. 144). Member checks helped confirm the researcher was drawing accurate conclusions from participants' lived experiences (Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004), ensuring their stories were accurately represented.

External auditing. To help confirm the data were being interpreted and presented correctly, the researcher had an external auditor. The role of the auditor included discovering “whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). The external auditor was a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas Counselor Education and Supervision program with qualitative research experience. The auditor reviewed the data to confirm the themes presented were supported and correctly presented. The auditor was the same person as the researcher’s peer debriefer, who is described later in this chapter. However, the researcher had meetings with the person to go over the data collected and the themes that emerged. These meetings were separate from his role as a peer debriefer.

Audit trail. An audit trail allows an external person to peruse the process of collecting data and drawing conclusions. An audit trail has six categories: raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Including this information in an audit trail demonstrates that the research and conclusions drawn are trustworthy. The audit trail contributed to trustworthiness by including all the necessary data, ensuring the text is easy to follow, the information is useful, and the text relates to the methodological approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

If a person would need to audit the research, the researcher would be able to show the steps taken to begin the study, collect data, and draw conclusions. All information is stored in a confidential and organized manner. All raw data are organized in individual file folders and sorted by type of data and the time it was collected. By keeping all information related to the

study, the researcher is able to demonstrate that the researcher conducted a rigorous and trustworthy study.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is an important technique to ensure credibility. The peer debriefer is someone unconnected to the research project and they help keep the researcher honest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer debriefer kept the researcher trustworthy by questioning the researcher to ensure all possibilities were explored. The peer debriefer asked the researcher questions to expose possible biases. The questions required explanation of the inferences and conclusions drawn from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Peer debriefing also assists a researcher by discussing any thoughts or emotions that could interfere with the researcher's good judgment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By discussing these thoughts and emotions, the researcher can process them and discuss coping skills (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Once they have been thoroughly processed, the researcher will be clear minded and able to draw appropriate conclusions without bias.

The researcher's peer debriefer was a fellow doctoral student who is also a qualitative researcher. Peer debriefing took place after contact with the participants and the data collected. Peer debriefing served as a time for the researcher to discuss the process of conducting the research and any personal thoughts and feelings the researcher had about the information collected. During this time, the peer debriefer helped the researcher stay aware of any potential biases that could impact the conclusions being drawn. Meetings to debrief about data and conclusions being drawn were separate from the meetings about external auditing.

Transferability

The purpose of qualitative research is not to take the findings of the study and generalize them to the larger population (Shenton, 2004). It is impossible to generalize the findings due to

the nature of qualitative inquiry (Shenton, 2004). Qualitative researchers strive for transferability, which includes an in-depth description of the research process and the conclusions drawn (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). The in-depth description allows the reader to determine how far the results and conclusions can transfer to another setting (Shenton, 2004). To ensure transferability, researchers provide information about the following:

The number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based, any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data, the number of participants involved in the fieldwork, the data collection methods that were employed, the number and length of the data collection sessions, and the time period over which the data was collected. (Shenton, 2004, p. 70)

This information will allow another researcher to duplicate the study. The researcher provided this information in the description of the study. The document provides information about who contributed to the research, a description of the participants, and the amount of contact the researcher had with each participant. People reading the study will understand how to use this method in a similar way to gather data for their research.

Dependability

Dependability is addressed through descriptions of the processes used in the research study. The report allows another researcher to duplicate the research study (Shenton, 2004). It is important to explain the research design, its implementation, the operational details of data gathering, and provide a reflective appraisal of the project. The description of the abovementioned details helped demonstrate the dependability of the research conducted. Shenton (2004) recommended enough detail for the reader to determine if appropriate research methods were applied to the research study. The details assist in understanding the rigor used during the study.

The description of the research has the details of the research methodology. People who read about the study can understand that the researcher took the steps necessary to produce a

quality study. Quality was demonstrated because the researcher was clear about the research process and having an audit trail.

Management Plan

The Table 4 describes the approximate time that recruitment was initiated for the research study and continues through the steps of contacting participants.

Table 6
Management Plan

Date	Event
02/01/2017	Sent out emails to programs and Listserv
02/14/2017	Sent out a follow up email
02/20/2017	Contacted participants to schedule interviews
03/01/2017	Began initial interviews
04/29/2017	Began follow-up interviews and member checks

Reciprocity

Researchers may use reciprocity to gain access to a particular setting (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). The researcher offered reciprocity to participants during the recruitment stage of this study. The researcher advertised that participants would receive a \$20 Amazon gift card upon their completion of participation. To complete their participation, they had to agree to the initial and follow-up interview, fill out the time-task analysis, and send artifacts. Larry, Kathy, and Craig received the Amazon gift card. Brian did not complete his participation because he did not send in the last 5 days of his time-task analysis and the artifacts. During his follow-up interview, he reported he would send his final 5 days. He also reported he needed to check with his program about what artifacts he was able to share. When he did not send these items, the researcher contacted him through e-mail, but he did not respond. Rachel

did not send the time-task analysis or artifacts or complete a follow-up interview. The researcher contacted Rachel and she reported she was on maternity leave and was not able to complete the time-task analysis. The researcher also contacted her at the end of her maternity leave, and she did not respond. Ann did not send artifacts or complete her follow-up interview. Ann had a follow-up interview scheduled but did not sign on to attend the scheduled Zoom meeting and did not respond to the follow-up e-mails sent to reschedule her follow-up interview.

Reciprocity also happens when participants are able to “examine field notes and early analyses” (Harrison et al., 2001, p. 323). Once all transcripts were complete, they were sent to the participant to review. During the follow-up interview, participants were able to confirm that the transcript was correct and were able to review the analysis of their interview. Participants will also have an opportunity to review the final document to understand how they contributed to the understanding of online school counseling programs with a CACREP accreditation.

Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology for this study. The researcher provided a rationale for qualitative and narrative inquiry. Then, the researcher explained the conceptual framework and how it guided the development of the research questions. The chapter included information about the participants and how they were recruited to participate in the study. Last, the chapter included information about the research design, data analysis, trustworthiness, and reciprocity.

Chapter IV: Results

This chapter includes an overview of the three online CACREP programs the participants attended, a description of the participants, a description of the school where the participants work as professional school counselors. The program and context of each participant is an important part of each participant's narrative and how they made meaning of their experience of earning a school counseling master's degree from an online CACREP program. Following is a brief description of the analysis process and a discussion of the interpretive lens. Last, themes are present that emerged from the data in detail.

Summary of Online CACREP Programs

To protect the confidentiality of participants and the three online schools, the researcher assigned each participant and school a pseudonym. The schools are named School A, School B, and School C. The purpose of not using the names of the online programs is to protect participants' confidentiality. Participants discussed their lived experiences of these programs; therefore, they need to be protected from any possibility of being identified through their association with a particular institution. All information that was used to describe the programs was found on the schools' websites or from information provided by participants who attend the online program.

School A. Four of the six participants received their master's degree from School A's online program in school counseling. School A's program includes "online coursework, residencies, and field experiences" (School A website, 2017). These three methods of education are expected to help students prepare to advocate for students in their personal, educational, and social needs. The school website states students will learn to "apply research and theories, connect with students, apply critical thinking, communicate with compassion, uphold

professional ethics, and champion the highest standards.” (School A website, 2017). School A promotes the use of the American Counseling Association and ASCA code of ethics as well as the use of the ASCA National Model.

School A uses a quarter system rather than semesters. Each quarter lasts 10-weeks with a 3-week break between quarters. Larry, a participant in the study, described these classes:

You really did assignments and it ended up into a major assignment so all of the assignments over the ten weeks kind of came into the one, but they all were pretty relevant to the counseling area. It was really the school counseling profession. I worked with people who wanted to be school counselors for the most part. Some of the classes were general.

A student must take a total of 72 quarter credits: 28 core course quarter credits, 20 specific residency or clinical experience courses, and 24 specialization courses. The curriculum for the school-counseling program includes an “emphasizes on assessment, intervention, and individual and group counseling” as well as learning about “classroom guidance, consultation, and advocacy for systemic change in schools” (School A website 2017).

At School A, students are expected to attend two separate 7-day face-to-face residencies. During these residencies, students are face-to-face with their faculty and peers. The first residency is labeled “Counseling Approaches and Techniques: School Counseling Residency Track 1.” This course is meant to help students learn and practice the clinical skills of individual counseling. The second is, named “Advanced Counseling Approaches and Group Techniques: School Counseling Residency Track 2” (School A website, 2017). The class teaches students how to enhance clinical skills necessary for individual and group counseling. The residencies are in a 6-week course, providing an opportunity for students to apply the skills learned prior to attending the residency. During this time, students “receive direction, feedback, and help as well as participating in peer review sessions, discussions, small and large group exercises, and role play and simulation” (School A website, 2017). Students who attend the residencies can expect

to learn “relationship building and theoretically-based counseling, assessment and goal setting, risk assessment and crisis intervention, ethical, legal, and cultural relevance, roles of school counselor, self-awareness, and scholarly communication” (School A website, 2017). School A uses the residencies to ensure face-to-face time with students to learn specific skills.

While attending School A, students also complete a 100-hour practicum and 600-hour internship. The practicum experience focuses on students’ clinical competencies. The internship experience is described as a focus on “supervision, teaching, and research.”

School B. One participant attended School B. The institution has a Master of Arts in school-counseling program offered in three different formats: on campus, off campus, or online. The online program is for students who are unable to drive to a campus location or whose schedules do not allow for on-campus learning. The online courses are delivered through a variety of methods. Some classes take place during a specified time during the week, whereas other classes are text-based and asynchronous. The difference in class deliveries requires students to either have a set time for class or flexibility to work on their own schedule.

School B states its program goals for students. These goals are general goals to help students become professionally competent counselors. The goals are listed as “personal growth, development of a broad knowledge of counseling theory and research, and development of individual and group counseling skills, and knowledge of auxiliary services and follow-up” (School B website, 2017). To achieve these goals, students are required to complete 60 credit hours. Students take a variety of classes as well as completing a practicum and internship. Students’ practicums and internships are completed in the community in which they live. The students’ supervisors for the practicums and internships are located in the community.

Along with online classes, students must attend 2-week-long intensives in the summer. During the week-long intensives, students “interact with faculty on campus and further develop their counseling and interpersonal skills, from learning groups, become acquainted with the program and its expectations, and receive tutoring, advising, and intensive supervision” (School B website, 2017). The intensives help students experience more focused instruction.

School C. One participant attended School C, which has a strong Christian foundation. The program’s graduate-student counseling handbook has information about the type of student who would be a good fit for this program. The counseling program is designed for:

(1) those who have graduated from an accredited undergraduate institution; (2) those who wish to become competent counselors who are capable of working with a variety of clients in multiple settings; (3) those who wish to serve others in the counseling process; (4) those who are interested in exploring how faith is related to the counseling profession; (5) those who wish to be trained by seasoned faculty members from a faith-based institution; and/or (6) those who wish to be academically prepared to sit for the exam to become a licensed professional counselor, a licensed marriage and family therapist, or a certified school counselor in [this state] or many other states. (School C website, 2017)

Students who apply to this program have an interest in counseling and want to attend a school that is faith-based. The mission of this program:

is to educate invested and caring individuals who will serve in a variety of settings as counselors characterized by integrity, humility, skillfulness, and understanding. We desire that these professionals will be leaders who facilitate healing, growth, reconciliation and spiritual well-being for diverse peoples. (School C website, 2017)

Students can expect the program to meet the following goals:

1) to provide students with the specific knowledge and skills required of clinical mental health counselors, school counselors, or marriage, couple and family counselors as delineated by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), 2) To prepare students to understand, evaluate and engage in scholarship related to the field of counseling, 3) To prepare students to meet the educational requirements for state licensure as a licensed professional counselor (LPC) or as a licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT), or for certification as an elementary and secondary school counselor, 4) To provide the knowledge and skills that enables students to incorporate faith, religion, and spirituality into counseling, and understand how Christian faith connects with the counseling profession, 5) To guide students toward an ethical practice of counseling that is grounded in professional and spiritual values, 6)

To help a diverse student body become self-reflective leaders who understand and address how issues of discrimination, privilege and oppression impact the practice and policies of counseling in a multicultural society. (School C website, 2017)

This program requires students to take 30 hours of core counseling classes and 30 hours of school-counseling specific courses. Rachel stated, “If you live locally, you did have the option of doing some hybrid classes as well.” After completion of this program, students are prepared to take the Praxis II examination and be a certified school counselor in the state where the school is located and other states that accept online degrees.

Three programs are represented in this study. Although four of the six participants attended School A, they did not attend at the same time. All three programs have similarities such as the residency requirement and the use of the ASCA model. The programs also have differences. For example, one program has a strong faith foundation. The descriptions of the programs will be discussed in depth through the participant narratives.

Summary of Participants

The researcher recruited participants through the use of Listservs such as CESNET-L and individual state school-counseling associations. The researcher e-mailed information about the study requesting volunteers to participate in the research study. Upon volunteering, participants received the informed-consent form. After reviewing and signing the informed-consent form, participants and the researcher agreed on a date and time for the interview. The interview included demographic information and questions about their online experience and their school-counseling position.

Five participants are from five different states in the United States. One participant lives in another country. The states represented are from the east coast, southeast, Midwest, and a mountain state. The demographic information for each participant appears in Table 5.

Table 7
Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Race	Type of program	Online school	Level	Years at current position	Previous SC position	Total number of years as a SC
Larry	M	52	Caucasian	Asynchronous	A	10th L–Z and 11th	4	3	7
Kathy	F	59	Caucasian	Asynchronous	A	K–12	4	0	4
Brian	M	36	Caucasian	Asynchronous	B	6th–12th	5	0	5
Rachel	F	28	Caucasian	Synchronous	C	H–O, 9th–12th	1	2	4
Ann	F	42	Caucasian	Synchronous	A	K–12	8	5	13
Craig	M	44	Caucasian	Asynchronous	A	9th–12th	2	0	2

Note. SC = school counselor, L–Z = students whose last names begin with those letters.

Larry. Larry is a 52-year-old male who has been a professional school counselor in his current position for 4 years. He attended School A to earn a master’s degree in school counseling. He began in his program May 2007 and graduated June 2010. He described this program as asynchronous except when he was in his internship. He had synchronous group supervision with his professor and peers. He chose to attend School A because he “learned the importance of CACREP accreditation”, and it “really seemed to get the most bang for your buck.” He also had prior experience with online education due to earning a bachelor’s degree through an online program. He is also pursuing a doctoral degree from an online institution.

When he began the online program, he was not sure if he was going to pursue a school-counseling or a mental-health-counseling degree. He decided on a school-counseling degree:

I like being in school systems. I like working with kids. I was doing a lot of youth ministry, and I did a lot of praying about it and that was what made me switch, it was prayer and feeling more comfortable with that situation.

Larry stated he made the right decision to pursue school counseling because he feels comfortable with his position. Larry made the choice to pursue school counseling because it was a good fit for him, and he chose an online program to help him reach his goal.

Larry expected the program to include much writing, some residences, a closer group of people, and professors of the highest quality. He thought he would receive more support from his peers. Larry described his expectations were met because he did a “tremendous amount of writing.” Larry conveyed the classes were not easy because he had to do extensive comprehensive research “whereas in a classroom I wouldn’t have had to [do] as much work as I did.” He also reported enjoyed creating friendships with “people who had the same exact goal as I did,” which was different from his undergraduate program where “I never knew anybody.” Larry’s expectations of schoolwork were exceeded, but his expectations for building friendships surprised him.

Larry is a high school counselor responsible for students who are in the 10th grade with last names L through Z and all 11th graders. Total school enrollment is 990 students. Of the student body, 62% are considered economically disadvantaged. Students with disabilities comprise 9% of the student body whereas only 1% of the student body are English-language learners. Racially/ethnically, 36% are African American, 4% are Hispanic, 1% are multiple races non-Hispanic, and 59% are Caucasian. The mission of school “is providing quality education-preparing for the future one student at a time.” The district and school do not provide specific information about the role of a school counselor.

Kathy. Kathy is a 59-year-old Caucasian female. Prior to becoming a school counselor, Kathy was a special-education teacher. Kathy attended School A beginning in October 2010 and graduated in June of 2013. She decided to attend an online program because she lives in a state

with “very few opportunities that do not require her to move.” Online was the best option for her to earn a master’s degree in school counseling. When Kathy started the program, she expected the program to “be rigorous and thorough and prepare me well to be a professional school counselor.” She thought it would be a program that “would address current issues that affect schools and impact students, so up-to-date but also require some critical thinking and problem solving.” Kathy “was totally satisfied with the experience” and “it did require a considerable amount of critical thinking and research.” Kathy reported her favorite part about being trained online was “I could go and complete work whenever I had the time to do it. I wasn’t confined to a physical location at a specific time.” However, she said that sometimes she had some technical issues that were frustrating, the school was good about fixing issues quickly. Kathy expected her program to prepare her for a school-counseling position and reported it was a good experience.

If she could change something about her program, Kathy expressed that she would:

add more information about specific size schools. My program, it seemed geared more towards very large schools. There was not much for tiny little K-12 schools how to operate as a lone school counselor in a rural remote school district.

This is an issue because Kathy is a lone school counselor in a small, rural K–12 school. Kathy reported:

I am starting year one and I’m the only school counselor in a 50-mile radius. I would have liked to have been prepared for how I might handle ethical issues in that situation or scheduling issues or things like that.

Kathy would have appreciated learning how to address the challenges of being a lone school counselor.

She also really enjoyed her counseling theories class. In this class, she was able to “identify my own theoretical orientation and coming to a clear understanding of that was one of my favorite courses there.” Her “favorite part of being a school counselor is using play therapy with youngsters.” During Kathy’s program, she was able to discover her own theoretical

orientation. While performing her school-counseling duties, she enjoys using play therapy to work with younger students. While Kathy enjoyed play therapy, she was not clear on whether she received this training through her online program or through another format.

Kathy is a K–12 school counselor in a small rural K–12 school. As of the 2016–2017 school year, the elementary school had 59 students enrolled, 29 in Grades 6 through 8, and 53 in Grades 9 through 12. The district has a vision “to develop a community of enthusiastic, responsible learners,” and a goal “to ensure all students achieve at high levels.” The school’s website does not contain information of what the district defines as the role of the school counselor.

Brian. Brian is a 36-year-old Caucasian male. Brian attended School B for a master’s degree in school counseling. He began his program in the spring of 2013 and graduated in spring of 2015. He chose an online program because “it was really my only option. My path was a little backwards. I became a school counselor and then went to graduate school.” Brian is a school counselor at a school outside the United States. He needed to have an online program because it was his only option. The country where he works as a school counselor has no local school-counseling programs.

He did not know what to expect when he started his online program.

I wasn’t really all that familiar with it at the time and so I didn’t know if it was going to be one of those programs where like you get a degree, or it was going to be like something that was really rigorous.

He researched several programs and chose not to attend them because they did not look strong or did not have CACREP accreditation. Brian discovered CACREP accreditation while considering programs. It was important to Brian that the program he attended would “help prepare me and to really make me better at what I was trying to do.” Because Brian was working as a school

counselor while in school, he wanted a program that was going to help him improve as a school counselor.

Brian reported his overall experiences as “great.” “It motivated him to go into the Doc program immediately.” Brian expressed “I learned so much that I wasn’t quite ready for it to end. And so I just applied to roll over into the doc program. I mean I really, I got a lot out of it.” Brian was satisfied with the education he received. Although he is satisfied with his program, he believes “there’s definitely gaps in my knowledge and gaps in my skills that I’d want to fill but I don’t see that as a result of the program. I see that as there were other influencing factors there.” The gaps Brian mentioned will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Brian described enjoying his online education so much that he continued on to School B’s doctoral program.

However, Brian reported organization was a big part of attending an online program. “At the beginning of the semester I had made a calendar of everything that was due, but you’re not in class so they’re not like actively reminding you or stuff.” This was a problem because he had an experience where he missed an assignment on the syllabus and saw a message about it the night it was due. He explained sometimes he “would miss something because my organization wasn’t quite up to par, and I’d be scrambling to try to fix it in the end.” He believes there was some value in learning to be organized but “it was just a frustrating process.” Brian reported learning to be organized was important because it was easy to miss an assignment or something.

Another struggle was trying to find time to work on his schoolwork. Brian explained “It was asynchronous you can really kind of do it whenever you want which is—there’s value in it but at the same time it becomes harder in the moment sometimes to justify spending time on it.” Brian worked as a full-time school counselor and has four children and a wife. He shared that these other responsibilities:

makes it harder to maintain balance sometimes because it's an easier thing to push off and say, I'll just do it after everybody goes to bed. But by the time everybody goes to bed I'm exhausted. So, then I'm sitting down trying to do it as opposed to forcing me to be there during the day when I'm fresh.

Brian struggled to make time to work on his online program because he had to manage his various responsibilities.

The class Brian enjoyed most was his professional school counseling class. In this class, he had an assignment to develop an advocacy plan. Brian revealed "going through that process and developing that fundamentally shaped the way I see school counseling." Brian started his school-counseling position before beginning a program, so he "was making it up as I was going along." Brian did not have school-counseling experience prior to his first job, so he was learning as he was doing it.

At his school, he described "there were a lot of social issues within the student body and school-wide." Brian tried to help with these issues, but admitted, "I had no clue what I was doing." Through this advocacy assignment, he did a lot of research and found that the best way to create change was to empower students. Therefore, "we've developed our program into empowering students to drive the change they want to see in the community and so as part of the assignment I did a survey 6th through 12th grade, a community wellness survey." This one assignment made a significant impact on Brian and how he viewed his role as a school counselor.

Brian is a school counselor at a high school outside the United States. The school is "regionally accredited in the United States by Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and by Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)." This school is considered "monolingual," so it offers curriculum in English. It also offers Spanish, French, and Dominican social studies classes. The total enrollment is 664 students. All students (100%) attend a 4-year

college or university. In 2016–2017, 51% of students attended a university outside their home country.

Brian is considered a guidance counselor in his position. The school website offers information about what he can do for students.

SCS Guidance helps students become *personas íntegras*, people who are characterized by fullness of health in all aspects of their lives: academic, spiritual, social, emotional, and physical. In pursuit of this goal, we use a holistic approach that meets students where they are and provides them with the environment and tools they need to reach their potential. The administration of new parent/student orientation, course selection, student academic records, standardized testing, and college planning are conducted from the Guidance offices. Guidance oversees all standardized testing - including MAP, AP, SAT, PSAT, and Dibels—and coordinates academic tutoring. (Brian’s school’s website, 2017)

In addition to the above duties, the guidance program offers something called *community* that “supports student leaders who are committed to strengthening school community.” Brian is also able to meet with students for individual counseling, or to “provide group counseling and interventions for students facing social and emotional struggles and work with the student body as a whole to help ensure a safe, nurturing environment for all students.” College counseling is also part of the guidance department.

Rachel. Rachel is a 28-year-old Caucasian female. She attended School C’s online program. Rachel defined her program as synchronous. However, she had asynchronous and synchronous courses. Because Rachel defined her program as synchronous, the researcher represented it as synchronous. This program was located in the state where she was living when she began the program. Rachel “moved halfway through the program” to another state. Rachel attended School B for her bachelor’s degree. Rachel stated one reason she stayed with School B was because she was “already comfortable there” and “it was a natural transition.” When Rachel enrolled in the program, she “didn’t really care so much if it was online or in person, but because I moved halfway through, and I was able to finish up” it seems that she is happy she chose to

attend online. Rachel disclosed she was glad that the program was flexible. She said it really helped to be able to “pick up and move and still finish” without needing to “put our [her and her husband] lives on hold for another year and a half.” Rachel chose to attend the online program in the state where she was living. However, she moved during her program, and was able to continue her classes due to the online format.

Rachel conveyed she was unfamiliar with online education prior to starting an online program. She had not taken any online classes, “so it was a big jump.” She said she “knew that I would be one of those people that would put the time in and do what I needed to do.” However, she was still “a little bit nervous about” starting an online program. She reported she was worried about it being “a lot harder because it’s all on you. Just to stay up on everything without being in a traditional classroom.” Rachel began her program not knowing what to expect but was nervous because she would be solely responsible for remembering to do her schoolwork.

Rachel described her experience online as a positive experience. She would “definitely recommend it to people, especially if they’re a little bit older and have a family, and it’s hard to go to the classroom.” Rachel talked about her mother who went back to school after having a family, and how she was limited in choices because of living in a rural area. Rachel’s mother had to drive about an hour to attend class. Rachel perceived that to be “just crazy.” It can be inferred that Rachel believed her mother and others who are geographically isolated may benefit from online education, opening access to people who had not previously had access. Rachel perceived she did not lose anything with her online education and the material provided. However, “it does take a little bit more self-discipline.” Rachel would recommend online education to other people who are unable to attend a traditional brick-and-mortar program.

Her favorite part of being trained online was her internship experience. Rachel said, “that’s when it all comes together”, and “there’s nothing like actually working with kids and being in the building.” She also liked her supervision time because she could learn from her classmates’ experiences. Rachel’s internship experiences were at an elementary school and then a high school.

Rachel has worked for the same “district for four years, but I’ve worked elementary the first two. Last year, I did middle and high school, and this is my first year of full-time just high school.” Rachel’s high school encompasses 9 through 12 grades. Rachel envisions herself staying in “high school until I retire.” Rachel has only worked for this school district.

The enrollment at the high school is 729 students of whom 381 are male students and 348 are female students. Ethnicities are divided into American Indian or Alaska Native (7), Black or African American (8), Hispanic or Latino (6), Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other (8), White or Caucasian (699), or Multiracial (1). Of those, 287 students are eligible for free lunch and 64 students who are eligible for reduced-price lunch.

The mission of the school district:

is to produce a healthy, responsible, productive citizen who has acquired learning and is capable of contributing to a global community. We will accomplish this by providing an effective, innovative, dedicated, motivating staff, using developmentally appropriate, relevant curriculum in an exciting, interactive environment conducive to learning by students prepared to learn. (Rachel’s school website, 2017)

School counselors are part of helping the district meet its mission. The school district for which Rachel works has defined the role of a school counselor. The role is defined as working with each student on academic progress and future career plans. School counselors are also responsible for working with students who are demonstrating behavioral difficulties and for encouraging parent involvement. When Rachel was asked to define her roll, she expressed she tries “to align myself with ASCA standards.” She sees herself as someone who helps “with the

academic, careers, and definitely in social emotional issues that arise. So, trying to keep the balance between the three.”

Rachel’s caseload is 250 students. She works with three other professional school counselors, dividing the students by alphabet. She has students with the last names “H through O.” Her typical day looks different depending on the time of the year. An example of what she does is meeting with students individually.

In the beginning of the year, we meet individually with all of our seniors, and then we go down to our juniors, sophomores, freshman. So, we at least hit all of our students at least once throughout the school year.

Rachel cited her days look different, depending on what is needed for that specific time of the year.

The goal of her school’s guidance department is to:

assist every student in all areas of his or her high school career. The website has a list of services a student can receive from the guidance department. The services include ‘academic advisement, transcripts, career planning, individual counseling, college applications, assistance with PSAT/SAT/ACT, parent/teacher/student conferences, Educational Center information and more.’ (Rachel’s school website, 2017)

These duties are areas defined by ASCA. The school also offers counseling through an agency located inside the school building.

When asked about classroom guidance, Rachel stated “at the high school level, we don’t do much. We don’t push in on a regular basis. We do meet with our students in larger groups.” These meetings are used to disseminate information students need through the school year. Rachel said, “it’s hard to get teacher’s time.” She would like to do more guidance.

Rachel explained she had a positive online experience and would recommend it to other people. After completing her degree, Rachel has worked at one school at different grade levels. She reported her role as a professional school counselor is determined by the ASCA National Model.

Ann. Ann is a 42-year-old female. She attended School A for her master's in school counseling degree.

Even though the other participants from school A identified their program as having an asynchronous delivery model, she defined her program as a mix of asynchronous and synchronous because she had “multiple classes where we had to meet weekly, but it was not all of them.” Therefore, Ann described her program as synchronous. Ann was a school counselor prior to earning her degree. She explained she had to retake classes because her credits expired from when she had originally started her degree. She was a traveling school counselor, working for five different schools. The schools varied from K–12 schools to “a one room school house out in the middle of nowhere. Grades K–8, and there [were] two kids in one school. There were 8 in another, and 10 in another.” Ann was working in this position when she went back to school to finish her degree.

Ann stated “I was really nervous to start with, because I had never taken any online classes before. And, I'm not big on technology. So, that was probably my biggest fear.” She was also worried about the quality of education she was going to receive because it was an online program. Although she had these worries, Ann reported her experience was “wonderful.” Ann explained she was anxious about starting her program because it was a new experience, but she shared she had a good experience with her online program.

Ann really enjoyed how flexible the program was and also the residencies. Residencies are when students have week-long face-to-face meetings with peers and faculty. During these times, “we role played a lot.” Ann would get to be the counselor and then would switch and play the student. Ann liked the flexibility of an online program, but she also liked the face-to-face time spent with faculty and peers.

When the researcher asked Ann about what she disliked about the program, she spoke about being frustrated by her lack of being prepared to help students with career advisement. She explained “there was nothing on preparing for careers, and so, it’s just been kind of learn as you go.” The majority of her older students come to her for help on discovering what they want to do when they get older, and:

they don’t prepare you how to do mock job interviews or teach them how to do resumes. Or interest inventories. They touch on the interest inventories a little bit, but it is very brief. And I find that consumes the majority of my time.

Ann perceived her program did not prepare her adequately for helping students with their career needs. Ann also said she found “that the counseling program focuses on kids that have problems. Which there is those, but the majority don’t. And they just need guidance, which [the] vocational piece comes in there.” Ann explained how she needed to have more instruction how to help students with their career needs and how to assist students who need someone to guide them through school.

Her favorite class was her practicum class because she was able to collaborate with her classmates. She gave the example of practicing her counseling skills and then “talked to everybody about how it went.” She enjoyed being able to talk with her peers and see them face-to-face through video conferencing.

Ann is a K–12 professional school counselor. The district in which she works has 138 students. The student demographics included: 71 males, 67 females, 127 White, 10 Hispanic, 1 Asian American, 18 students with disabilities, and 35 low-income students in the 2015–2016 school year. The researcher obtained this information from the specific state’s department of education.

The district’s website did not include a specific job description for the role of the professional school counselor. The district does state that its mission is “To prepare each student

for the future and for lifelong learning.” Its philosophy of education states the district “believes that the general purpose of education is to provide quality programs for students to make each individual a responsible and productive citizen, who is capable of reaching his/her fullest academic, emotional, physical and social potential.”

Craig. Craig is a 44-year-old Caucasian male. He attended School A for his school-counseling master’s degree. Craig began his program in December 2011 and graduated in August 2015. He tried to attend a brick-and-mortar program, but:

it was wintertime and driving in the snow and then trying to be gone at least one night a week and then I think that was going to have to be increased to stick to this program requirements. So it was just too much.

Therefore, he decided to attend an online program. He chose School A because it has a CACREP accreditation and the state he where was going to work requires the online program to have this specific accreditation to allow a person to earn an online degree and also be eligible to work as a school counselor. An online program seemed to fit his needs. However, the online program he chose to attend must have been CACREP accredited due to his state’s licensing requirements.

His expectations of his program:

were that it would be a chance to kind of connect with more technology learning modules and finding a variety of ways to gain access to content, to learn, to interact with classmates, and have some flexibility where it didn’t always have to be real time to do that.

Some of his expectations were met whereas others were not. He did experience flexibility and was able to set his own schedule and work at his own pace. He also appreciated that he was able to “interact with a lot of diverse learners and gain some perspectives from people across the country. And we got a chance to have a variety of faculty.” However, he became frustrated with:

the routine of online learning was very rigid and at least through School A where it was read this article. You're going to post a couple of posts, use APA to support your thinking and then by research and you're going to reply to at least two learners by a certain deadline and you would probably have a paper that you'll write. So, it was very kind of rigid in that way where it felt like there wasn't as much diversity with maybe some video lessons, observing a lecture, maybe some interactive tools that you could engage more with assessment and things.

Craig would change the way some of the instruction was delivered. He explained wanting to have "multi-modal instruction that's sprinkled throughout your class, so you do get to [do] a little bit of everything. Especially to reach the diverse learners." He reported wanting to have "more opportunities for some synchronous communication." Craig explained wanting more variety in content dissemination.

His favorite class in his program was his Introduction to School Counseling class because he was "really zoning in on the job." He was learning more "about dealing with students and dealing with their needs and it's not as theoretical" as his crisis class, diversity class, or special-education class. Craig acknowledges that these classes were important, but he liked the school-counseling-specific classes best.

Craig's school website has a section for guidance and counseling. In this section, students and parents are informed that the guidance and counseling department:

provides a developmental, as well as pro-active, preventative and remedial services for students and their purpose is to empower all learners to lead satisfying and productive lives by assisting them in identifying and achieving educational, career, personal and social goals. (Craig's school counseling website, 2017)

It also defines the role of a school counselor.

- School counselors are actively committed to helping students explore their abilities, strengths, interests and talents as these traits relate to career awareness and development.
- School counselors help parents focus on ways to further the education, personal and social growth of students.

- School counselors work with teachers and other educators to help students explore their potential and set realistic goals for themselves.
- School counselors seek to identify and utilize community resources that can enhance and compliment comprehensive school counseling programs and help students become productive members of society.
- Comprehensive school counseling programs are considered an integral part of the educational process that enables all students to achieve success in school. (Craig's school counseling website, 2017)

Craig's district expects school counselors to work with all students to help prevent and remediate academic, personal/social, or career problems. He is expected to work with teachers, staff, and community members to help meet the needs of students.

Craig is a high school professional school counselor. Craig chose School A because it fit his needs of being able to work on his schoolwork when he was able and also met the requirements of his state for licensing. He explained he expected his program to use a variety of teaching methods to provide instruction. Craig reported he did not have this experience in his program. Craig's narrative about online training will be discussed later in this chapter.

Participants shared the reasons they wanted to attend an online program. Participants reported they needed the flexibility of online education due to lifestyle factors, family responsibilities, or geographical isolation. The researcher noted that the participants did not share the reason they chose their specific online was because of its accreditation. Brian and Larry mentioned knowing that a CACREP accreditation was important, but it was not the main reason they chose an online program. Brian needed online because he did not have another option. Although, he may have chosen the specific school because of the CACREP

accreditation. Craig also acknowledged that he chose a school with a CACREP accreditation, but it was because his state required this accreditation. He chose online because he needed the flexibility due to job and family responsibilities. While CACREP is the highest accreditation a program can have, it was not the main reason participants chose a specific online program.

Description of the Analysis Process and Theoretical Lens

The researcher analyzed the transcripts to develop themes. The process of creating themes began with understanding the emerging categories. After the categories emerged, the transcripts were read for key words and phrases, which became the open codes. Then, the researcher analyzed the open codes to identify axial codes. The researcher condensed the axial codes to selective codes and further condensed the selective codes to create themes. The themes are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The theoretical lens used to view the data was social constructionism. “Everything we are, do, think, feel, experience, and so on exists against the backdrop of cultural characteristics and within a social milieu” (Luke, 2016, p. 7). People create identity in the context of their environment. The participants are all professional school counselors. They told their story about online training and how it prepared them to be school counselors. Participants reflected and told these stories in the context of being school counselors.

Research Question 1

How do school counselors describe and make meaning of their experience of an online school-counseling program?

Participants answered questions about their online program. When the researcher analyzed the transcripts, themes emerged. The first theme was access to higher education. Participants described the reasons they chose to attend an online program. The second theme

identified was interpersonal relationships. The participants explained how they developed or did not develop relationships with their professors and peers. The third theme that emerged was diversity. Participants explained how the diversity in their programs affected their experience. The fourth theme identified was independent learning. Participants explained how they perceived their learning to be self-driven.

Access to Higher Education

All participants chose an online program with a CACREP accreditation to pursue a master's degree in school counseling. Larry shared he chose an online school because:

I didn't feel that with my lifestyle at that time I was doing this I could go to a brick and mortar. There wasn't anything near me that was CACREP accredited. The nearest CACREP accredited school was about an hour away. They were adamant that you quit your day job and go ahead and do that. I wasn't able to do that at the time. That was really got me to do an online program.

Larry explained he could not quit his job to pursue a degree full-time, so he needed a program that would work with his lifestyle. Like Larry, Kathy chose an online program for "convenience primarily. I live in [a state] and there are no—very few opportunities that don't require moving and so I was looking for the ability to get, to stay where I was and get my degree." To access a brick-and-mortar school, Kathy would have had to move to another town, and she "could not do that." Both Larry and Kathy live in places where access to a traditional brick-and-mortar school was geographically difficult to find and attend. If they wanted to pursue a traditional program, they would have had to make life changes they did not feel they could make at the time.

Ann also reported lifestyle was a limiting factor in attending a brick-and-mortar program. She stated she chose an online program "because I have children." Craig had similar needs. He expressed he tried to attend a traditional program, but it was not a good fit because:

it was wintertime and driving in snow and then trying to be gone at least one night a week and then I think that was going to have to be increased to stick with this program requirements. So it was just too much.

Being gone from his family more than 1 night a week would be too much because of his responsibilities as a parent. Craig also needed a program that offered:

the flexibility of being able to kind of work at my own pace, maybe not feel like I had to drive to a specific campus and meet a specific time. But instead could do it after I put the kids to bed and kind of work through it at my own pace based on my needs.

Craig worked a full-time job and had a family, so needed the flexibility to do schoolwork when it was most convenient for him.

Brian had a different path. He was hired to be a school counselor in a country outside of the United States without having his degree, so he had to find an institution that offered an online program. Brian explained his reasoning for attending an online school.

It was really my only option. My path was a little backwards. I became a school counselor and then went to graduate school. And so I work at a school [outside of the United States]. There weren't any local school counseling programs I could go through. So I was looking exclusively for an online program.

Brian had to choose an online program because he needed to earn his school-counseling degree, but he was not geographically able to attend a traditional brick-and-mortar program because no programs were located in his country. He researched programs and "wanted a program that was really going to help prepare me and to really make me much better at what I was trying to do."

Brian stated:

The fact that I was already in a school counseling position really motivated me in that way because I felt pretty incompetent at what I was doing because I came in from a different career and I'm out working with the students and trying to help them and it was very obvious to me what I didn't know.

He reported "there were a couple of programs that I chose not to pursue that had online because they didn't look as strong and they weren't CACREP accredited." Brian learned about CACREP accreditation while doing his research for an online program. It can be inferred that he decided the CACREP accreditation was important. Larry also chose to attend School A because he perceived it "was the one that really seemed to get the most bang for your buck," and it was also

CACREP accredited. Craig also needed a school that was CACREP accredited because “[his state] requires CACREP accredited, so I wanted to make sure that it had the accreditation.”

Although some participants perceived CACREP programs as stronger programs, Craig would not have been able to work in his state without earning a degree from a program that had a CACREP accreditation.

Rachel was a little different when she began her program. She attended School C, which has an online program or a hybrid program. If a person chose to take hybrid classes, they would have a chance to attend face-to-face classes on campus. Rachel decided to do the online program even though:

at the time, I didn’t really care so much if it was online or in person, but because I moved halfway through and I was able to finish up in [her state], it was ... I’m really glad that it was. That it allowed me to do that.

She is thankful that she “could pick up and move, and still finish. And not have to put our lives on hold for another year and a half.” Her online program allowed her to move with her husband and still complete her degree. She did not have to transfer schools when she moved from one state to another.

Online programs offer people a chance to pursue degrees without needing to make major lifestyle changes such as quitting a job or moving. It also offers an opportunity for flexibility to allow people to work when most convenient for them. Online programs offer access to people who may not have previously had the opportunity to attend a brick-and-mortar institution of higher education.

Interpersonal Relationships

Interactions between faculty and peers were described differently from interactions in a traditional face-to-face program. These interactions, whether electronic or in-person, impacted the relationships built between student and faculty and peer to peer. Larry stated most of his

communication was through an electronic source like a “discussion room, and you could have some real good conversation” with professors and peers.

Student to professor. Participants described their interactions with professors and how the communications impacted the relationships they were able to build with their faculty. Communication with faculty members varied from discussion posts and e-mail to video meetings and phone calls. Participants met in-person with their faculty members through two separate residencies during their online program. Residencies were week-long classes where participants went to a location either on campus or off to meet with faculty and peers. Participants described they practiced counseling skills and learned about specific topics during the week. Residencies will be discussed later in this chapter. Participants described their faculty members and the interactions they had while in the program.

Brian described his faculty members as being “overwhelmingly really strong, especially with their core faculty. There were adjuncts now and again that I wasn’t real crazy about, but our core faculty was really strong.” Larry stated, “you are building a relationship and that relationship can become much stronger but when you are working with them face-to-face you really understand how good they are.” He reported he was able to build a relationship with his faculty members, but it was when they were able to be in the same place at the same time that he really had a deeper understanding of their quality. Larry had to attend two residencies that entailed 1-week-long face-to-face intensive training. In explaining how his view of his professors changed, Larry explained, “Whereas if I am on the internet I think you are a pretty good professor but when we are sitting there during a residency. I know you are a pretty good professor.” Larry explained that he viewed his faculty members as strong when he just

communicated with them through his online classes, but he had a deeper respect for them once he was able to meet his faculty members in person.

Kathy acknowledged that her faculty members were “totally accessible.” Rachel also said in her program “they were definitely available.” Rachel and her peers were “interacting with professors just mainly through technology, and frequently.” Technology was important to Kathy’s communications with her faculty. She described that:

frequently my instructors would respond to my post with feedback and then I would respond back to them. That was the primary because the discussions were a major part of it. If we had questions we could email our professors.

Kathy also said there were times she met “for several classes we would get together once a week on something like this where we could see the professor and talk about specific issues that we were having.” Rachel reported she also had “regular meeting times, like this. So, there might be six or seven students and the professor online. And then you had to attend those, so you were always communicating.” During Craig’s program, he had face-to-face contact:

a few times during my internship and practicum where we’d have supervision and that’s where the professor would get us all on an Adobe connect screen and we’d have some face-to-face questions and interactions there. Those were the biggest time where there was really face-to-face visual.

Faculty used a variety of technology to communicate with students.

Through the different modes of communication and the variety of interactions, students were able to develop a relationship with their faculty. Rachel described how she was able to develop a relationship with her faculty:

You know them by name very well, and you feel like you can reach out to them and they know you and they know what is going on in your individual life. And where you’re at, and what your experience has been. Maybe some of your struggles, just because it is a smaller program. So, they don’t have as many students as maybe a larger university. So, that was definitely a positive thing.

Rachel believed her professors were “intentional about” [developing relationships].” Rachel explained she was not sure if her experience of developing a relationship with her faculty members was because she went to a small school, but Brian had a similar experience in his program.

And they did, one of the things I really respected about them and still do, right, because they’re still my faculty, is that they were very good at developing a positive relationship and pushing you really hard which is a fine line to walk. But I felt like they walked it really well, you know. And there were times when I felt like somebody was maybe a little too relationally oriented or maybe was pushing a little too hard, but for the most part I felt like they really found that balance of setting and maintaining a high bar, but at the same time been a positive relationship which in our field specifically, you know, I feel like is important.

Brian appreciated that his faculty members could build a positive relationship with him while also maintaining their role as educators and having high expectations of the work they expected from students, evidenced by the statement, “I think they did a really good job of separating the value of the individual from the work, right. And so your work either met the standard or—but that didn’t change you value.” Brian also valued that his faculty was able to model this type of behavior as well as:

modeling the type of [positive] relationship that we want graduates from the program to go out and have in whatever field they’re working in, you know. Like we’re supposed to be like—we’re supposed to be trying to figure out how to productively interact with other people, you know, and so it was—but at the same time and so I really respected the way they did both of those as a faculty.

Brian described how good professors were able to develop a relationship with students while also maintaining high expectations. The professors also were able to model how to interact and develop relationships with others.

Brian also described a new way of teaching they are doing in his program that helps students get to know their faculty members better. He is still in the program as a doctoral student

and does some adjunct teaching for them. An advancement the faculty members made is that they spend a lot of time making videos every week on their lectures. Brian explained:

when they do their lecture videos they only do one take. And so if they lose their train of thought or if they stumble over a word of it they do something it's just in there, right, which makes it feel more genuine and more authentic and you know you'll see them kind of get distracted and laugh at something or I think it would be really easy to edit that stuff out and try to put forth this perception of like I have it, like this, like I just have this nailed down perfectly. But you don't get that in a class, in a face-to-face class you actually don't have that ability and I think that helps build a relationship.

Brian shared showing these videos and the mistakes they made may help the faculty seem more authentic and also replicate the traditional classroom a little more. Larry agreed he appreciated faculty members who would admit "I don't know the answer. I'll go ahead and try and find out." Larry liked that professors were able to admit they were human and did not know everything.

It was also helpful, in developing a relationship, to have the same professors for more than one class. Ann described her experience with having the same professor multiple times this way:

She seemed to teach a lot of the classes that I had. And so, I had her for multiple times... there was actually two of them that I had multiple times. So, I was able to kind of build a relationship with them, so it was almost like you saw them every week and you know, they got to know you a little bit, and they would ask you how your family is doing, and how the ball game went. And, that sort of thing.

Ann's experience demonstrated her professors were able to know more about her when they shared multiple classes together. Ann valued being able to have faculty members for more than one class, and that they asked her about her personal life. Overall, Ann reported that interactions "with the professors were wonderful. [Although], you didn't really have a lot of interaction, but it was primarily ... it was good."

However, some participants felt they missed out on building a relationship with their faculty members because they were not in a traditional face-to-face program. For example, Rachel described her least favorite part about being trained online:

I think that even though you have contact with your professors, sometimes it is nice if you can just pop into their office if you have a quick question. I mean, you're always emailing. And doing like Skype or Zoom meetings like this. I forget what ours is... we don't have Zoom back then. Trying to remember what it is called. But, so that's nice, but I do think that it would be, you know, beneficial just to be able to pop in and chat with them on kind of those, unexpected times as well. So, I think that's what I've missed.

Rachel cited how she missed being able to meet with her professors face-to-face without needing to schedule a specific meeting time. Because participants were not in the same geographic location as their professors, it can be assumed that if they needed to meet with a professor it would need to be scheduled for a specific time and mode of technology to be used. Rachel's experience exhibited some perceived limitations to her experience.

Because participants were not in the same geographic location as their professors, they had to rely on technology for communication. Larry had an issue with a "professor who was unresponsive," negatively impacting his experience because if he sent an e-mail "and [the professor didn't] get back to me for three weeks, so that is like a third of the semester or quarter or whatever." The lack of communication affected how Larry viewed his relationship with this professor. He reported that "we just never saw eye to eye." According to Larry's narrative, a professor who did not respond in a timely manner could impact the relationship between faculty and students.

Craig had a different perspective on his interactions and relationships with his professors. He described that most "professors would start the term with an introductory video. They'd record themselves, tell us a little bit about themselves." After the initial video, the professor and student "interactions ... beyond [the video] were usually were in a reply to your post. Sometimes there was a message, like an email system that we might get an email or message from our professor." However, Craig stated "for most of them it was, you know, medium to

minimal. I mean it was, you had some dialogue and rapport within the course room that we were using. But there wasn't a ton of connectedness." Craig reported, in his experience:

when you don't have a super connection sometimes it's hard to you know, sometimes they don't know you well enough to really get that feedback or know maybe how much to push. If you know me and you know that I ... so maybe there wasn't enough knowledge of me to learn for them the instructor to know how to get the most out of each other. And me, I don't how comfortable I was to say hey I need more. Especially if I'm getting the A. I was like, alright, let's just keep rolling.

At times Craig could have used more feedback from his professors, but he did not ask for it, especially if he was doing well in the class. In Craig's program, he did not believe professors knew him well enough to help him do much self-exploration. For example, he stated:

there wasn't a lot of challenging your thinking or constructive something. Sometimes there might be a question back, or "did you think about this?" But you know, I didn't feel like I got stretched very much through that interaction to think differently or to question or yeah, to just push me beyond my comfort zone.

In Craig's experience, the lack of relationship with his professors affected his personal growth.

One suggestion he had for how to mitigate this issue was:

maybe if you're in a cohort model and you know, one term you're with these two teachers and the next term you're with two new ones but then you go back and forth in a different way that you get more consistency in your professors.

The amount of exposure students had with their professors could impact the depth of relationship and sense of connectedness.

Craig did have a few of professors with whom he felt he had more of a relationship with during his program. He explained he felt connected to a research professor "because we did have some phone call opportunity" to discuss how he was doing on his research project. Larry also described "when I had questions and we couldn't resolve it through email. We could have a phone conference call. And it would clarify where I was at." Being able to talk on the phone helped participants have another way to connect with professors.

Craig also had a good experience with a professor who taught his crisis-intervention class. He expressed “when I did go to [residency] I would always seek her out just to make a connection because I did feel connected to her. She was very real.” Her experience as a school counselor along with her personality helped him feel connected with her. As a school counselor, he e-mailed her to ask about having a phone call “because we had a bunch of suicides at our school and I kind of wanted to get some perspective. And she was one I was super comfortable to reach out to.” This was a professor he trusted to reach out to when his school was experiencing difficulties. Larry also expressed he preferred professors “who shared their personal experiences.” When professors shared personal experiences, participants were able to connect what they were learning with real-life situations.

Participants’ relationships with their professors varied in depth. Participants described having good interactions with professors through technology. Relationships developed more fully when participants were able to be in the same geographic location as their professors. Being in the same place helped to form connections. One participant explained that having a connection was important to reaching out for assistance and also the depth of feedback that was given. Relationships with faculty members were perceived as positive, but some challenges arose due to not being in the same geographic location.

Peer to Peer. Participants described their interactions, and the relationships they developed with their peers. Some participants reported not having much relationship with their peers whereas other participants established more significant relationships. Participants had communication with their peers through a variety of technologies such as discussion posts, e-mail, and video software, while also seeing them face-to-face during their week-long

residencies. Ann expressed “we had multiple interactions with [peers] in various ways” such as synchronous class time every week, small group projects, or commenting on assignments.

Discussion posts or boards were a major part of how participants communicated with peers. Kathy reported “I would submit a couple of discussion posts every, you know, on average two to four every week and then respond to peers.” Kathy would participate in the discussion by submitting posts to which peers could respond, and she had to respond to them. Brian reported communication with peers “was much more limited, really limited to just discussion boards.”

Because communication was limited mostly to a discussion board, Brian explained how he:

pretty quickly started identifying the people whose discussion board posts I would read. You know, because I was like okay well they usually have something good to say that I’ll be able to respond to, you know, and so it does get more limited and as for me I started self-selecting who I was reading because I was trying to complete the assignment and so I wasn’t necessarily going through and reading 25 or 20 people’s worth of posts every week.

Brian chose who to respond based on how they usually posted in the discussion board. He did not want to take the time to read through everyone’s posts. Brian explained he did not develop much of a relationship with his peers “whereas in a face-to-face class I wouldn’t have had that ability and so I probably would have developed more of a relationship with them and I would have had interactions with them outside of that like really specific environment.” Brian explained he did not interact much with his peers outside of the classroom, which is different than he believed would happen in a traditional face-to-face program. He said, “they become more one dimensional.” Since he did not see them much outside of a discussion board, he saw them more as discussion posts rather than peers.

However, Craig had a different view of how to use the discussion board to get to know his classmates. He described:

peer interactions usually started each term with a self-intro post and I would always try to read those quickly. Usually we could get in the course room the weekend before so I would try to read those and try to respond to some people.

Reading through the posts allowed Craig to learn something about his classmates. He described responding to classmates with whom he might have something in common, such as living in a similar place. As the class progressed, Craig said:

I'd personally try to vary the people I replied to so by the third or fourth week I'd replied to everybody. So I wasn't always replying to the same person because then they don't really know you or vice versa.

By replying to different people, he was trying to develop a relationship with all his peers. Craig seemed to put more emphasis on developing a relationship with his peers through the discussion board than Brian, due to the intentionality of to whom they would or would not respond to in the class.

When trying to develop a relationship with peers, Ann shared it helped to “see people year to year and so you develop a little bit more of a relationship with them than if it was just through discussion boards.” Ann reported “it seemed like I had a lot of the same people in each class. I didn't anticipate that happening. And so, I got to know some of them very well, throughout the process. And, what was kind of unique.” Brian and Ann's programs had a cohort model. This seemed to help them develop relationships with their peers because the same students were in their classes throughout their program.

Kathy also described being able to see someone's face may have impacted the experience of an online program. By the end of the program, she was able to video chat with her professors and peers. She stated, “you get a face to somebody's name and for some reason it just changes the experience a little bit.” She shared that being able to see people's faces “made it easier to form connections with some of my peers.” Kathy's explained how being able to see a person's face helped form a connection with that specific person.

Attending residencies impacted the peer relationships. They were able to be in the same geographic place. Craig disclosed that when they were:

face to face obviously we had a lot more interaction. When we were in Chicago and Arizona it was, we're in class, we're role playing with each other, we're eating meals together, you know, trying to go out to dinner, do something with each other a little bit. So there was a lot more getting to know you and you know, I think I mentioned the last time, there was a Facebook group. When you had those more intense interactive times that's when I felt more bonded and so that's kind of how you got to know people best.

Being in the same geographic location and face-to-face was when Craig was able to get to know his peers best. Rachel shared during her intensive weeks "you got to see each other." Rachel reported one of the weeks was focused on practicing counseling skills. Rachel said "when you are doing your partnering up for the sessions. You got to know your partner very, very well." Working together at intensives and in their classes was one way to get to know their classmates. Larry explained that at his intensives he "enjoyed interacting with people who had the same exact goal as I did." He disclosed the goal was "we were all going to save the world." He also explained he had a relationship with his peers because "we were all in the same boat." Larry perceived he was able to develop a relationship with his peers because they all had the same focus and were able to share experiences.

While in classes, participants had class projects and needed participants to work with their peers. Kathy gave the example of:

only when we were doing projects that required collaboration and so then depending upon the project it would be a Zoom type meeting where we would just get together and decide who was going to cover what. But otherwise no face-to-face.

Kathy described working with her peers to complete class projects. Because students were online and could live anywhere in the United States or another country, Kathy explained when choosing partners that time zone was a factor. Rachel also had to work with peers for class assignments and shared it was important "to have good communication when you are not

together.” Rachel emphasized the importance of being able to communicate clearly because communication was mostly written. Brian also supported the need to communicate clearly. Part of the reason he did not respond to certain people’s discussion posts was because:

people who didn’t know how to proofread and so it was really impossible to figure out what they were trying to say. I would stop reading their stuff because for me it felt like a waste of time because I wasn’t going to be able to respond to it, so it wasn’t helping me get the assignment completed.

Brian chose not to engage with people whose posts were not written clearly. Effective written communication seemed to be an important factor with online students.

Rachel and Ann, during their practicum/internship experiences, were able to communicate face-to-face with peers through video software. Rachel described her experiences as a time:

where we all had to share and talk and have that time where they could say, you know, strengths and weaknesses. And things that were going on with them, with their courses or their practicum/internships. So, that was a lot of the discussion time that we had.

Rachel and her classmates were able to discuss and provide feedback about their experiences at their individual schools. Ann explained that she liked:

my practicums the best. Because, then we got to actually bounce everything off of our classmates. How there’s went, how mine went ... and we got to feed off of each other. So, the ones where we actually got to have that weekly face to face, those are the ones that I liked the best.

Ann liked being able to have weekly face-to-face time with her peers best. It can be inferred that being able to see each other impacted the relationships built between peers.

Participants had different ways they tried or did not try to connect with peers. Communication seemed to mainly happen through discussion posts. One participant reported self-selecting to not engage with some peers whereas another participant was intentional about interacting with all his classmates. Overall, peer interactions seemed to vary on how much each participant wanted to invest in getting to know their classmates.

Student Diversity

Participants described the different students who were in their programs. They did not expect the diversity of students. In Rachel's program, she experienced having students who were "people like me who are right out from undergrad. And then, you have people who have been working ... you know, in the workforce for a long time, and they're coming back." Students in the program were in different places in their careers. She explained:

some of them already had like their mental health counseling degree. Some had marriage and family, some were teachers but they wanted to go back into counseling. So, you kind of had a wide mix of people who were a part of the program, which is nice.

Rachel described liking the variety of students who had different career experiences. Ann's experience in her program "was a little unique, I was the only one who was actually counseling at the same time that I was going to school." Because she was working while in the program, she had a different perspective from other students.

Ann explained that if she had attended a traditional brick-and-mortar school in her state "everybody would have just understood where I was coming from. Because, we're all of the same culture." Because she attended an online program, she reported, "I was able to be exposed to all sorts of different cultures and things that I would never think of." Craig also had this experience in his program. He described that it "offered me a chance to interact with a lot of diverse learners and gain some perspectives from people across the country." He further explained:

One thing coming from [my state] where there maybe is less diversity than other parts of the country, having classmates who were from really all over. From coast to coast plus you know, I think my internship had a guy who was in Singapore I think. So having just some of that variety of perspectives and culture and you know, folks from the South who you could really see some of that Southern cultural influences and even kind of religious perspectives come through which might be different than someone from the North East or [my state]. So I valued that in terms of getting to know people who were not like me whether it was race or religion or a culture piece. So a good variety of people that brought I think good perspectives. And even background for me. You know I was

coming from a teacher background where some of these folks were just out of college which was, I was forty some and these folks were 22. So it was kind of interesting to see their youthfulness at times and whatnot versus there was some people that were 60 and this was like their third career and they're going back because they really wanted to make a difference. So that age and yeah, total diversity was a big positive I would say from this program that I wouldn't have got had I gone [to a traditional school in my state].

He reported that he “enjoyed just meeting learners from across the country and getting to know them.” By attending an online program, participants had an opportunity to have peers from different places inside and outside the United States, different career experiences, and different life experiences.

Student diversity seemed to be unexpected for Ann, Rachel, and Craig, but they described how they believed it added value to their online experience. They had an opportunity to learn from people who have a different cultural context.

Independent Learning

Participants perceived online education required participants to do a great deal of research to support their schoolwork. They also viewed it as a more individual learning environment than a traditional classroom. Their studies were independent because class time was asynchronous, and some participants perceived they had to do more self-teaching. Larry explained how he:

talked to my friends that are in a traditional and they will tell you they did work but they did a lot of stuff in class and didn't have to do or write certain things. Or they didn't have to do by themselves. They had you know they could just work with another student.

Larry perceives that in a traditional classroom, students do not have as much outside work and students can work together more often than he experienced in his online program. He explained he did a “tremendous amount of writing,” and the work was completed independently. He also mentioned having “to do more research. You had to really dig deep whereas I think in a classroom I wouldn't have had to [do] as much work as I did.” Larry explained he had to do

research to support his responses to the discussion board. He was not able to merely offer an opinion without research for support. He described an example from his crisis class. His professor presented various crisis situations and students had to respond about how they would handle these scenarios. Larry agreed when I summarized, “they wanted you to be specific” in how you would handle the situation. He also added “they wanted the research there” to support the solution. Larry perceived “in the brick and mortar you are not doing as much research. Not doing as much reading into different theories and what works.” He perceived his online education required him to research and read more than he would have in a traditional program. He also believed he had to complete more work individually than students who were enrolled in a traditional brick-and-mortar program. Because he was not in a classroom with peers, Larry had to complete work without the support of his peer group, whereas in a traditional classroom, students can collaborate more.

Similar to Larry, Kathy reported her classes also “require[d] a considerable amount of critical thinking and research.” Kathy gave an example of how her classroom assignments required critical thinking and research. “In almost every class I was in, they would provide us with scenarios that we would then have to write a research topic about.” Kathy gave an example of a scenario and the research required to complete the assignment. For one of her classes she “had to select three individual students at different developmental ages who were all dealing with a physical disability.” In this project, Kathy “chose a student who had lost both legs to a congenital disease.” In the assignment, Kathy had to “address how that might impact them developmentally, socially, emotionally, and then to consider how that would affect our ability to school them and what sort of supports they would need in school.” To complete the assignment, Kathy had to research the “progression of the particular disease that the young man was dealing

with and then what is being done currently with kids who have medical disabilities in school and by school counselors.” This project required Kathy to research a student who would have specific needs, and what a school counselor would need to do to assist with these needs. Kathy expressed “it was a long process.” The project Kathy described demonstrated how class assignments required research about the disease and understanding of how a school can help a student with these specific needs.

Research and critical thinking require a student to engage with the learning process.

Brian shared his experience with online education at School B:

Online program in a lot of ways you have to teach yourself because you’re not going in and you’re not listening to a professor and my undergrad was face-to-face and so that was a new experience for me but you’re not going and listening to a professor talk so you can’t like go into a classroom and zone out.

Brian agreed when I summarized “it sounds like it forced you to be more engaged in the process of learning versus being disengaged and just doing enough to get the grade that you want for that class.” Brian’s experience seemed to imply that students have to be more engaged in the learning process because they are responsible for their learning; a professor does not disseminate the required material. He reported “you’re having to proactively reach out and seek clarification on stuff.” In Craig’s follow-up interview, he acknowledged it was accurate to describe his learning as “very independent [or] self-learning.”

Online classes are also more independent “because it was asynchronous you can really kind of do it whenever you want which is—there’s value in it but at the same time it becomes harder in the moment sometimes to justify spending time on it.” Brian acknowledged it was hard sometimes to make time to work on class assignments after working a full-time job and also handling family responsibilities. Brian gave an example of when working asynchronously could be more difficult. He had a situation where he checked his online class and saw:

[there] was an answer to a question about a paper that I didn't know anything about and I had missed it in the syllabus. So I went back and looked at it and at the beginning of the semester I had made a calendar of everything that was due, but you're not in class so they're not like actively reminding you of stuff like that and I had missed it in the syllabus.

Because he was not going to class or meeting with his class at a specific time, Brian did not realize he had this project to complete. He was responsible for reading the syllabus and knowing what was required for the class.

Rachel also reported being a little nervous about how online education may be harder “because it's all on you. Just to stay up on everything without being in a traditional classroom.” Rachel was worried about how having greater responsibility for knowing what was happening in her classes because she would not have the structure of a traditional classroom. Brian's story about not seeing an assignment demonstrates how online students may need to be more organized and structured to be successful in an online program. Rachel stated, “It does take a little bit more self-discipline I would say.” However, she did acknowledge that it takes self-discipline to get to class. Participants experienced needing to be responsible for knowing what was required for each class because no professor was verbally reminding them.

Engagement. Craig expressed that, in the beginning, he expected his program to offer “a chance to kind of connect with more technology, learning modules and finding you know, a variety of way[s] to gain access to content.” However, he did not experience his classes this way. He described being frustrated with the:

routine of online learning was very rigid and at least through [my program] where it was read this article you're going to post a couple posts and use APA to support your thinking and then by research and you're going to reply to at least two learners by a certain deadline and you would probably have a paper that you'll write. So it was very kind of rigid in that way where it felt like there wasn't as much diversity with maybe some video lessons, observing a lecture, maybe some interactive tools that you could engage more with assessments and things.

Craig wanted to have different ways of connecting with the material, but that was not what he experienced. He viewed online learning as routine and would have liked to have opportunities for other teaching methods. He described his experience as independently reading an article, writing a discussion post with evidence, and then writing a paper. He shared he would like to change his program to “maybe have some more opportunities for some synchronous communication.” He would have liked to have more scheduled times for faculty or peers to meet together.

Craig also acknowledged that in classes “the lack of feedback [which] at times was frustrating. Where your professor might now respond to your post every week. So maybe you only get a professor feedback two to three times out of a ten-week term.” He shared that his assignments:

were rubric based, so it was more of a box would get checked saying you earned these points in this level, but there wasn’t a ton of “hey you could of done this more” or “you should have done this” or even “hey this is really great, keep that up.”

Because assignments were graded using rubrics and a lack of additional feedback, Craig found it hard at times “to engage and improve in myself.” Craig explained he did what he needed to do to get an A, but he would have liked more feedback because “even if you are getting an A it doesn’t mean you can’t get better.” Craig described doing what he needed to meet expectations, but he would have appreciated more feedback to being more engaged with the material. Craig reported that “sometimes it felt more like, hey I’m just completing the requirement, checking off boxes versus quality.” Brian also acknowledged that he is:

fairly good at getting a grade that I want in class, and if it’s face-to-face class I can kind of zone out and I don’t necessarily have to really learn the material to do that. But I didn’t have that option in this, so it really put me in a position where I was forced to learn it and I got a lot more out of it because of that.

Whereas, Craig wanted more feedback and to be more engaged in learning, Brian believed he had to be more involved in his learning to earn the grade he wanted in the class. These two perspectives may demonstrate how students may perceive their level of actively participating in learning and what motivates them to engage. Both participants spoke about wanting to have good grades. However, Craig wanted to be pushed more to have a deeper understanding of the material, whereas Brian believed he had to be an active participant in learning because he did not have a face-to-face teacher.

Supervision. Participants had a practicum and internship they had to complete as a requirement of their programs. During their practicum and internships, participants spent time at a variety of schools, applying what they learned in their classes. They had to receive supervision from a school counselor unaffiliated with the program. Some participants described a lack of supervision. They were working in schools without the necessary guidance and oversight. Therefore, they were working independently. Larry explained “a negative: I didn’t have as much supervision time with [my site supervisor] as I would have liked.” Larry wanted to have more in-person supervision. However, he reported “that does not have anything to do with an online program. I just think it is just the realm of how things are sometimes.” Larry expressed that not getting enough site supervision was not specifically impacted by the fact his program was online instead of a traditional brick-and-mortar school. Although, he “was still in having group supervision on the phone. During practicum and internship every week for 90 minutes” with the professor of his practicum and internship professor and class, Larry perceived he could have benefited from having more supervision from his specific site supervisor.

During Brian’s “practicum our other counselor was able to supervise me. She qualified and so that was really nice.” He liked that he had someone onsite he could ask questions. It was

helpful for her to be onsite because he was working as a school counselor while he was earning his degree. However, he had an issue with her supervising him during his:

internship experience [because] she didn't meet the qualifications and so for my internship I worked with a school counselor that's in California who I basically cold-called because I really liked the program that she had developed at her school and she was nice enough to do it. So I would meet with her once a week and so - over the phone. I would just call her on Saturdays and we would go over the stuff that happened that week. She would give me supervision on it. But I didn't have someone in-house who was evaluating what I was doing on a day-to-day basis, so I wasn't getting a lot of hand's-on supervision. I mean I can always go to our elementary counselor for a consultation and I do that a lot but I wasn't getting like really a lot of hand's-on supervision or training in individual or group counseling. It was kind of, it was researching, trial by error and then talking to from a supervision perspective or from training perspective, talking to people who were off-site and them just giving me feedback.

The elementary school counselor did not qualify as his internship supervisor because although she had a school-counseling degree, she did not have a state certification because she had worked outside of the United States her whole career. Brian picked his internship supervisor because he liked what she was doing at her school. Brian's supervisor was a school counselor in the United States. He reported she was helpful but:

often felt more like a consultation than a supervision because I was having to explain to her things that were going on and kind of our cultural context and she was really helping me put things in perspective and giving me ideas of what needed to happen.

Brian's internship supervisor was able to provide some direction for him, but it was difficult because she needed help understanding the context where he was working. Brian shared that supervision was difficult because he "had to identify areas to discuss with her as opposed to her being here and understanding the school and the context and her being able to identify areas" of improvement to discuss with her. He reported that he has "noticed gaps in my own knowledge or gaps in my ability that may not have been there if I had taken more of a traditional route." Geographically he was unable to have a supervisor onsite. Because she was not onsite, it

impacted Brian's supervision and may have impacted his development as a school counselor. He described that he:

did send videos to my internship supervisor, so she got to see some videos but I've continued to work with her, I've still never met her face-to-face. She's never been to our campus. She doesn't know our students. So it was a little bit odd in that aspect.

He was able to send her videos of him working with students, but she was not able to see and give feedback on the daily tasks. Because she was not onsite, Brian described not "getting a lot of hand's-on supervision or training in individual or group counseling." He reported that he learned by "researching, trial by error and then talking to people who were off-site and them just giving me feedback." He also received supervision from the professor for his internship class.

Ann also had a supervision experience similar to Brian in that she received supervision, but it was not at the depth she would have liked. Her supervisor was a "retired counselor that I replaced came back and supervised me." Ann explained her supervisor "usually wasn't there, but she came just to satisfy the amount of minutes that I needed to be observed." When Ann's supervisor came to observe her:

she would get me at the younger kids ... with the kindergarten and first grade, and then she would come and observe upper elementary. And then, high school. And you know, she got her minutes in and that was about it. And she was able to give some good feedback. However, she was 80. You know, when she was a counselor, it was a bit different than it is now, and she was very part-time. So, she was only two days a week, where I am full-time. So, it was a bit different.

Ann was referring to how the role of a professional school counselor is consistently changing. From Ann's statement, it can be inferred that her supervisor helped her to complete a program requirement and was helpful, but her view of the role of a school counselor was different from that expected of a school counselor in Ann's current position.

Participants reflected on their experience of attending an online CACREP program.

Participants explained how they decided to attend an online program versus a traditional face-to-

face program. Once they made the choice to attend an online program, participants reflected on how they interacted with faculty and peers and how important or unimportant it was to them. One aspect some participants noted as important was the diversity they had in their online program versus what they expected would have happened if they attended a traditional school in their state. Participants also reflected on their perceptions that they had to do a great deal of research for their classes. Some participants even described how they believed they were responsible for their learning.

Research Question 2

How do the school counselors describe how their online experience prepared them to work in their current positions?

Participants described their individual school-counseling positions. Their descriptions included their school environment and responsibilities as a professional school counselor. When the researcher asked participants how their program prepared them, their responses were dependent on what they needed to learn to be effective in their specific position.

Impact of the School-Counseling Context

Participants reflected on their experience of being trained online, and how it prepared them to be professional school counselors. Participants worked in a variety of locations in and outside the United States. Two participants are K–12 school counselors. Three participants work in a high school. One participant is responsible for 6- through 12-grade students. Participants described their context and its impact on how their online program prepared them or did not prepare them to be professional school counselors.

Larry's description the professional-school-counselor role and preparation.

Currently, Larry works at a high school in a southern state. He has held this school-counseling

position for 4 years. Prior to this position, Larry had three previous school-counseling jobs. His total number of years of school-counseling experience was 7.

Description of the school-counselor role. Larry described his “role as [a] school counselor as someone who is assisting in the growth of the students both from a career, academic standpoint and also a mental health standpoint.” He believes it is his role to help students with their academic and career needs as well as assist with any mental health issues that may come up. He also says, “I am an advocate.” He is an advocate for his students with the other stakeholders in his school district.

Larry described a typical day as “there is no such thing.” He tries to create a plan where he is “meeting [with] 4–5 kids to talk about their future and set up there 5-year plan.” If students are not scheduled to meet with Larry, they come “into our office all of the time.”

To help understand how Larry divides his time as a school counselor. He was asked to fill out a time-task analysis for 10 days. The document separated his time into five categories: guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, system support, and barriers. Larry reported that in the 10 days, he spent an hour conducting guidance curriculum by giving academic information to a class. On the majority of Larry’s days, he spent more than 50% of his time doing individual student planning, for example, through dual-enrollment parent/student meetings. Larry’s time-task analysis reports on Day 2 he spent time doing a suicide assessment, which is an example of a responsive service. He listed his system support as meeting with his fellow counselors. On the 9th day of his time-task analysis, Larry reported he spent 67% of his day testing. According to Larry’s time-task analysis, he spends the majority of his time with students doing individual student planning while also trying to uphold his responsibilities of guidance curriculum, responsive services, and system support.

Larry revealed his classroom guidance is limited. He reported “we do classroom guidance in the beginning of the year. We really are required to in the classroom two times a year. The first time is our counselor orientation.” At the beginning of the year, they try to educate students about the role of the school counselor. He reported it is hard to do classroom guidance because “the teachers aren’t really receptive very much for us to be there.” Guidance is difficult due to teachers resisting the use of instructional time for nonacademic activities.

Larry labeled his responsive services as response or resistance to intervention (RTI). He shared RTI in his counseling department means running groups such as an academic-success group, anger-management group, or divorce group. He reported he is “the only one who has done the anger management group because I have the training in crisis. So somehow it has fallen to me.” Larry did not elaborate on why his crisis training helped him with anger-management groups. Larry also meets with students individually if they are having any issues. Students can request a meeting using a “Google form,” or school counselors have an “open door policy” such that students can come and talk with a school counselor. Another way Larry described his responsive services are having “school building level committee [meetings] if kids are failing.”

As a school counselor, Larry works to meet the academic needs of his students. Larry described students have two ways to graduate from high school in his state.

One that is to go to college and one [is a] career diploma. He meets with every student to determine which path they are going to take. If a student is going the college path, they sign [the paperwork] and take it home and parents sign.

Students decide “to go on the career path and [we] take them out of the college path, [but] we have to meet with parents there.” Larry works with each student to determine post-high-school plans.

Larry meets the personal/social needs of students by being visible and having an “open door policy.” Students know “if it is an emergency they can come and see us.” Larry also tries

“to stay outside in the hall during class changes. The kids are really comfortable with us. We have a good relationship with the kids where they feel like they can come in and talk to us.”

Larry described being visible to students at his school and perceives students are comfortable with him and the other school counselors at his school.

Larry meets the career needs of students by “meeting with them individually.” He revealed he believes academic and career are closely related. The school has a career center. Larry also described talking about “career direction with our success groups.” He uses some motivational interviewing techniques and self-determination theory with students to help them discover what they need for their career. Larry perceived by “using motivational interviewing and self-determination theory. I think we cover a lot of academics and career.”

Perceived preparation for the school-counseling position. After Larry described his school counseling position, he shared how his program prepared him for his role. First, he said, “I had to do more research [which] allowed me to hear different people ideas in the process.” His research exposed him to a variety of ideas he can use as a school counselor. For example, he researched and read about different counseling theories and finding a theory that would work best for him. Although Larry completed a great deal of research, he also expressed that the online program “allowed me to think outside the box.” When asked what he meant, he described, “part of it is to think on your feet.” Each day Larry had a plan for how his day was going to go, but often the plan would change. He learned he had to be flexible and develop solutions to different problems. Larry attributed learning to be flexible and finding solutions to situations at school to his online program and the research and assignments he was required to complete.

When he compares himself to his colleagues, Larry said, “I feel that I am a better counselor particularly on the school side of things.” He described thinking “I’m a pretty good mental health counselor.” However, he believes he is not as good as another school counselor. Larry shared this other school counselor was trained as a mental-health counselor and had to take some extra classes to become a school counselor. In his program, Larry explained “we didn’t talk about long term counseling. We talked about brief counseling.” When doing counseling, Larry reported that he learned, “I need to empower [clients] to make good choices in [their] life that are good for [them].”

One area he wishes the online program prepared him to do was scheduling. He knows scheduling is not an ASCA-approved duty, but he loads all of the schedules in the system “because I don’t trust anybody else to do it.” Larry decided that he wants to be the person who inputs all of the scheduling data.

Although some of the duties Larry performs as a school counselor may not align with the ASCA National Model, such as duty and scheduling, Larry reported it is important to support ASCA. He stated “ASCA [has] set the foundations of our profession, no one’s going to fight for us. They’re the ones fighting for us right now.” He acknowledged ASCA is fighting for school counselors to have a “1 to 250 ratio of counselor to students. They are the ones recommending you don’t do duty. They are the ones recommending you don’t do testings.” Larry supported ASCA advocacy for professional school counselors and recommended appropriate duties.

Kathy’s description of the professional-school-counselor role and preparation.

Kathy is a school counselor in a Mountain State. She works for a K–12 school as the only school counselor at this school. Kathy has only worked at this specific school. Kathy has a total of 4 years of school-counseling experience.

Description of the school-counselor role. Kathy defined her role as a professional school counselor. She shared she is:

responsible for the entire developmental range of K–12 students. I see my role as providing classroom guidance that supports each of the different individual teachers based again on development, responding to individual counseling and small group counseling needs based on interactions with my colleagues and requests from colleagues. My role is also [to] provide a good example of collaboration and collegiality with my staff mates, be a leader when it comes to advocating for students and to really be able to articulate the role, you know what the counseling role entails.

Kathy is a lone school counselor who works to meet the academic, career, and personal/social needs of her students. She reported her program helped her define her role as a school counselor by focusing on ASCA and what it recommends for school counselors. She also reported she tries to educate teachers about “the range of services I’m available to provide for them as well as things that I will not provide for them.”

On a typical day, Kathy may have “a third of my K–12 classrooms for guidance, half a dozen individual counseling sessions, individual student planning with seniors as far as college readiness is concerned.” She shared she will meet with the other grades for individual student planning, but it is “not quite as often to plan their curriculum and help them identify college, career choices.” She will also have “at least one or two meetings a week.” Part of her responsibilities is supervising the National Honor Society. “If there’s an activity like a service project going on then I’d be [facilitating] that.” Another way she spends her time is “communicating with staff members” about how students are doing in class.

As part of Kathy’s participation in the research study, she filled out a time-task analysis. The time-task analysis provided understanding about how Kathy spends her time as a school counselor. The document is separated into the various duties of a school counselor such as guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, system support, and barriers. Kathy’s time-task analysis listed on April 24th, 47% of her day was spent doing

classroom guidance. Some individual-student planning includes “graduation progress 2 with 10th graders.” On April 25th, she spent 83% of her day doing “Life RU Ready” with sixth-grade students and listed this as a responsive service. One system-support duty Kathy listed is a fair-share responsibility. Each day Kathy begins her day with playground duty. Some examples of barriers are working on the master schedule, and “scholarship committee meeting and planning scholarship awards,” showing how Kathy divides her time among the various school-counseling duties.

Part of her time is spent providing classroom guidance. “K–1–2–3 focuses more on social skills [such as] listening and following directions and being a good friend and managing your emotions.” Kathy reported as students get older, she focuses on “more academic strategies and skills, note-taking, planning, using a planner.” Then, the focus in high school is “interest inventories and career inventories and helping them to identify what they’re thinking about pursuing after high school so that we can plan coursework that’s appropriate.” At a young age, Kathy works with students on personal/social skills, and as students mature, she focuses more on academics. Kathy’s online program taught her how to complete guidance by having “at least one or two courses designed to focus on classroom guidance activities.” Her program helped her learn about classroom guidance, but she also described having “a really excellent supervisor and so when I did my practicum and internship I watched what she did and how she organized the program and that was the most helpful to me using that role model of my supervisor.”

She described her responsive services as providing individual counseling for students whether written into a students’ individualized education plan or requested by a parent or teacher to see a student individually. She will also meet with a student who comes to her office and has an immediate need that needs to be addressed. She “also [has] to respond to parents, parent

phone calls, parent drop-ins, teacher drop-ins, [and] teacher emails.” Kathy spends time working with all stakeholders who drop-in at her office. “Students frequently require counseling. Teachers, parents, and others maybe just a listening ear, collaborating, things like that and with parents a lot of times it’s informational, providing information they might [need] about a specific issue.”

Academically, Kathy works mostly with high school students. She is “primarily responsible for making sure that they are meeting all of their graduation requirements as well as the requirements that they might need to qualify for this state scholarship.” When creating student schedules, she enrolls them in classes “based on their academic interests and their academic needs.” To help students have options in classes, Kathy will “reach out and identify distance education programs” and also works with “the local community college to provide dual credit courses for particular high school students.” She works with middle school students, but her academic work is more focused on “notetaking and organizational skills and keeping your locker clean.” Helping students academically is an important role for a school counselor. Kathy shared in her program, “I don’t necessarily recall anything specific along those lines except just for focusing on making sure that whatever you do supports academic achievement or supports achievement in some way.” Kathy’s program did not have any specific focus on teaching students to support academic achievement. However, she did support that the program encouraged that everything she did as a school counselor needed to support academics in some way.

Kathy described meeting the personal/social needs of her students through guidance lessons. Kathy explained “at the younger levels [lessons are] how to be a good friend, how to be a good listener. Moving into the middle school level, internet safety, dating safety, suicide

awareness.” Along with providing guidance lessons, Kathy uses “individual counseling if it’s needed or responsive services as they crop up and sometimes even small groups if there’s a common theme.” When planning guidance lessons for the younger students:

frequently it is the needs identified by the classroom teacher. It can also be what resources I’ve been able to find, so that can sometimes come into play but mostly it’s what the kids are exhibiting and what the teacher has expressed that guides especially K-5. When we get into middle school, we have some state requirements. We have to do internet safety and we have to do a bullying unit.

Because she works in a small rural school with:

140 kids K–12, I meet the in kindergarten and I have them until they graduate. I’m in my fifth year of knowing these kids, and so you really have a pretty good feel for where they need extra support.”

Kathy uses guidance lessons to help meet the career needs of her students. Students in kindergarten through fifth grade get an introduction to careers. She described, “we get more involved in looking at college majors in junior and early high school, looking at your interests, your abilities, your skills, and trying to match those up with particular careers.” She also explained she works with students on their future careers through individual student planning “especially as they get into high school ages and talking about where do you see yourself five years from now and then help them come up with a plan to get there.” Kathy begins exposing students to careers in kindergarten and works on personalizing and narrowing career interests as students’ progress through school. Kathy acknowledged her program taught about career through “specific individual classes geared toward career development.”

Perceived preparation for the school-counseling position. Upon reflecting on how her school prepared her for the aforementioned duties, she explained:

I feel like it gave me a really solid foundation of school counseling skills and then in addition with the practicum and the internship being at the school that I ended up getting a job at, I feel like I was totally prepared to step into the position.

She explained that the foundational skills she learned included “an understanding of child development, understanding of counseling theory and techniques, [and] the importance of being aware of ethical issues.” She was also “prepared for using assessments and for gathering data, you know all of the things that we’re trying to do to create an ASCA-approved program.” Her program prepared her to try to build an ASCA-approved school-counseling program. She also expressed an aspect that came through the program was “based on the ASCA National Model that we have to advocate for ourselves, our program and our students.” Advocacy was something she learned from her online program.

Although Kathy perceived she was well prepared to be a school counselor, she wishes her online program had taught her more about some aspects of her work.

I might add more information about specific, like specific size schools. My program, it seemed geared more towards very large schools and so a lot of—there was not much for tiny little K–12 schools, you know how to operate as a lone school counselor in a rural remote school district. You know, I’m starting year one and I’m the only school counselor in a 50-mile radius. I would have liked to have been better prepared for how I might handle ethical issues in that situation or scheduling issues or things like that.

She could have benefited from learning what it would be like to be the only school counselor for her school. Kathy stated “I wish there had been a little more preparation about individual counselors and how they might reach out to different people to help with questions that arise in practice that could have an ethical” component. Being a lone school counselor may bring its own set of challenges in comparison to working in a school with colleagues to consult with about counseling duties.

She also shared she was “not prepared for dealing with colleagues on a personal basis.” She acknowledged it might not be possible to teach this, “but sometimes that’s the biggest challenge.” She thinks her program:

could have done a better job at remind[ing] students to really set clear boundaries because people will ask you to do all kinds of things if you keep saying “yes” and so you have to

be able to protect yourself because that's a quick way to burn-out. That would have been helpful to know that a little sooner.

Kathy explained how it can be easy to overextend herself as a school counselor. She would have liked her program to warn her about how she was “going to have to advocate for [herself] and what is appropriate school counseling duties or duties that are not necessarily the most appropriate for the school counselor.”

Brian's description the professional-school-counselor role and preparation. Brian is a school counselor at a school located outside of the United States. He is responsible for students who are in Grades 6 through 12. He has been at this school for 5 years and did not have any prior experience.

Description of the school-counselor role. In his online program, he had a professional-school-counseling course. In class,:

we had to develop an advocacy plan which was really pertinent to what I was doing at the school at the time and I'm still doing. And so going through that process and developing that fundamentally shaped the way I see school counseling.

Brian reported completing this assignment influenced his belief that his “primary role as a school counselor is a social justice advocate.” Because he believes this is his primary role, he “view[s] everything through that lens.” Brian uses this view “whether [he is] preparing or proctoring an SAT or I'm working with a student who's suicidal or I'm doing schedules at the beginning of the year.” He defines social justice through the theory of “primary justice [where] everybody's right to fully flourish in every part of their lives simply because they exist.” Brian values each person simply because they are and works as a school counselor to promote this idea. Brian acknowledged how his program influenced his school-counselor role development by having “an openness to a different context [and] that the faculty had really allowed me to develop my identity as a school counselor for the context I'm in as opposed to the context that they were used

to.” Brian described that his faculty members understood he had a different context, and they provided feedback on it.

Brian is responsible for the school’s security and emergency-response plan. He explained that it takes up a lot of time and is not sure if it would be classified as system support or a barrier. He said, “it’s not traditional counseling and it takes a significant, depending of the time of the year, portion of my time.” It can be a barrier because of the time aspect. However, he views his role as a school counselor “as trying to build a community defined by primary justice, and I see safety and security as a big part of that.”

Although Brian is working toward being a social-justice advocate, he described what a typical day may look like his position:

Either [I have] planned meetings or impromptu meetings or student drop-ins. I spend most of my day talking to students and then try to do all of the logistical stuff in between the program stuff that we’re trying to keep running. I run a student leadership program. We have a freshman mentoring program. We have a community program. We have all sorts of stuff, and I try to keep all of those going but in between student meetings.

Brian described how he spends time meeting with students and then works on his other duties when he is not with a student.

Brian filled out a time-task analysis as part of the research study. He sent in 5 days documenting how he spent his time. The 5 days are separated into guidance curriculum, individual-student planning, responsive services, system support, and barriers. An example of his individual-student planning is meeting with students about college. His responsive services include “meeting with student for counseling, meeting with student about behavioral concern, and meeting with parents about behavioral incident.” An example of system support would be “meeting with [the] school director.” A barrier he lists is the time he spent reorganizing the security plan for the school. Brian shared he was not sure if this really was a barrier or system support because:

I really didn't see that as congruent with my role as a counselor in a healthy community and all of that stuff. But it's not traditional counseling and it takes a significant [amount of time], depending on the time of year, it takes up a significant portion of my time.

Brian explained that it can be a barrier because of how much time it takes up. He explained it could also be system support because he would attend the meetings as the school counselor, but he is in charge security, so it can be a barrier to spending time with students.

Brian described his classroom guidance is focused on "college stuff. We don't do a lot of social/emotional classroom curriculum." At Brian's school, "almost all of the students go to college. About a little more than half of the [students] usually leave the [country] for college." The students may attend colleges in the United States, Canada, Europe, and a few other places. Brian expressed he works "to educate them on all of the different application processes in all those countries." Brian uses classroom guidance to teach students about applying for college. Therefore, "almost all of the social/emotional stuff we do through our community program and our student leadership program." Brian learned about guidance from his online program through assignments where he "had to prepare lessons and turn that stuff in. Outside of that I don't know that there was a lot of stuff that was specifically classroom guidance."

Brian shared he rarely goes a day without having some sort of responsive-service duty.

He described having:

a really good working relationship with our teachers and with the principals. So, they call us in on a lot of things. It's anything from somebody's laptop got stolen to a teacher's worried that a student is suicidal to classroom behavior stuff.

He has a variety of ways he responds to student needs. When asked about individual counseling, he explained:

at the middle/high school, it's not really feasible right now and honestly I don't think that's where our best effort is. I think our best effort is at a system level. And then filling the gaps, so we're more crisis response than traditional counseling. There are students that I meet with regularly, but those then to be pretty extreme or pretty severe situations that I do that and there's not a lot of outside resources for our students. So if

someone's really struggling there's a lot of times there's not a lot of people to refer them out to. We try to handle that in-house when can.

Brian will perform individual counseling when needed, but that is not where he focuses his effort. He has "some groups that we run that are weekly, but honestly it's even hard to find time for those." When asked how he learned about responsive services, he reported with "any online program is a lot of self-teaching." He reported learning to perform responsive services "was mostly through assignments. Some through the lectures."

At Brian's school, he does not work much with the academic needs of his students. "We leave a lot of that up to the teachers and our department, our Special Ed department and a principal." He continued to explain:

we're not a huge school but we have 30 teachers and a principal who are experts in academic development people who have an expertise in social and emotional development. And so because we are so busy I tend not to [do] academic stuff because I feel like we have a ton of people on campus who can address that but probably a few of us that can address these other things and so we keep our main focus there.

Brian believes his time is better spent on other student needs than academics. However, "if there are students who are struggling academically, then we'll obviously talk to them and help them work through barriers or identify what's going on but that's the extent of it." Brian's work with academics is limited because he relies on other people to help students with academics. In his program, "we talked about a lot of that stuff and they went over a lot of that stuff. I think for me a lot of that was in one ear and out the other." Brian described that meeting students' academic needs was taught in his program, but he does not use much of what was taught. He reported "the academic stuff that I've done here is fairly limited and it wasn't based really a ton on what I learned in the program."

To meet the personal and social needs of his students, Brian will do some individual counseling. However, his:

big aim and what we really work towards is developing a community that is defined by like Rogers conditions for like empathic understanding, unconditional positive regard, non-judgment and all those things. I feel like when we can facilitate the development of a community that's defined by those things, then we end up helping all students. The students who are experiencing minor issues or maybe less severe issues, if they are coming to a school every day in a community defined by those things, then they don't need intervention from us at all, right. And so then we can focus on students who are going through more severe struggles.

He explained he tries to create this environment because he has 350 students and “could only give each student 45 minutes a year” if he met with them all individually. He wants students to “regulate each other and regulate themselves then [I] have time to go in and fill the gaps where there's somebody more in crisis [and] it's not appropriate for them to try to handle this situation.” Brian shared that he works from a bottom-up approach:

where we pour the vast majority of our effort and resources into the students and then just try to keep the staff somewhat knowledgeable about what's going on, right. We're just not spending a ton of time training them because they know how to do [what] they're doing, so we want to teach the students. We want to train the students.

Brian wants students to have the skills to help cope with personal and social issues. He disclosed in his program:

there was a lot on that. A lot on the helping all students and it was all assignments. I really feel assignments were the biggest thing, because I had to do a lot of research and figuring out like how I was going to do this or how I was going to do that.

Brian described completing research for assignments to learn to meet the personal and social needs of students. He gave the example of developing the community program he uses at his school as a class assignment.

Last, Brian works with students on their career development. He described using curriculum for career needs. Students at his school are in the socioeconomic elite of the country. Students usually have a family business or a career they come back to after going to college. Some students may not work in the family business because they are not interested, the business has no place for them, or they have other passions. Brian explained these students will not

struggle to find work outside the family business. Brian described his role is “helping them find how they’re going to view that work.” To learn how to meet the career needs of his students, Brian had a career class.

Perceived preparation for the school-counseling position. Brian was a school counselor before beginning his online program. He reported that his program “didn’t really help prepare me for the position, but it helped refine what I’m doing.” Because he was a school counselor while he was attending school, he revealed he:

would learn something and then I would come and I would try it. I would start applying things and I would immediately think of an idea or a thought or a problem because I could immediately relate it to what I was doing and struggling with day in and day out.

Brian was able to implement what he was learning as he was learning the information. Yet, he acknowledged “there’s definite gaps in my knowledge and gaps in my skills that I want to fill but I don’t see that as a result of the program. I see that as there were other influencing factors there.” When asked to explain further, he shared he knows he “still [has] a lot to learn.” He described not having an onsite supervisor during his practicum and internships, so he perceives he “had to do a lot of self-teaching.” He reported the most obvious gap he has “would be using specific theories for individual counseling.” He explained that he had his week-long residency:

but those were like you were just learning the basic skills. You know, core conditions type stuff. And they are very Rogers based, but I didn’t have somebody that was on site watching my sessions. I wasn’t sitting in on sessions with an experience counselor who had like a really developed application for a specific theory, so I was kind of learning that on the fly and I don’t do a ton of individual counseling, because I see the best use of my role at a more systematic level.

Brian perceived he had to learn about individual counseling as he tried to do it. He divulged he began to understand what a deficit he had in his counseling theory when he entered his doctoral program and heard other students talk about their counseling theories.

After being in the program, Brian's "idea of what a counselor was supposed to do change pretty dramatically." He described "my first year I gave a lot of advice. So I was trying to solve problems as opposed to just facilitating them finding their own solution." Initially, Brian wanted to fix the problem for his students instead of letting them find the solution. He stated "my goal is for them to be better and to be closer to who they want to be and so a lot of times that necessitates just letting them be uncomfortable for a while." He described making this change early in the program after receiving feedback when he attended his first residency. Brian made a shift from wanting to fix his students problems for them to facilitating their own problem solving.

Rachel's description of the professional-school-counselor role and preparation.

Rachel is a school counselor at a high school. She is responsible for meeting the academic, career, and personal/social needs of students in 9 through 12 grades with last names beginning with H through O. She has worked at this school for 1 year. She has held two previous school counseling positions totaling 4 years of school-counseling experience.

Description of the school-counselor role. She described herself as a school counselor who tries "to align [herself] with the ASCA standards." She reported "I see myself helping with the academic, careers, and definitely in social emotional issues that arise. So, trying to keep the balance between the three." Rachel explained that as a school counselor she viewed her role as having the responsibilities recommended by ASCA.

Rachel's shared her typical day depends on whether it is fall, spring, or summer. Through the school year, she reported meeting with all students individually at least once. She admits this is the "bare minimum." When working with seniors, she described it is:

prepping for their final steps, what their plans are and if that's going to work. Whether they are going to the military or college, just making sure that they are on track for

graduation. [Reviewing] what's left for state exams. Helping them fill out college applications, helping them stay focused in school, and make sure that their attendance is okay.

Rachel reported she helps students with their post-high-school plans. With juniors, sophomores, and freshman, she discusses their plans with them and scheduling. Rachel also spends days “checking in with students individually for individual counseling. Having a lot of 504 and instructional support team [meetings].” During instructional-support team meetings, the team is reviewing students who are considered at risk “identifying who's in the referrals, whose attendance is slipping, whose grades are slipping” and meeting with these students. Rachel is also responsible for “answering teacher's questions, answering parent's questions or being part of different committees.” Rachel shared her school has an “awareness committee that focuses on the social and the emotional piece.” Rachel reported that all of the things she listed “could [all] be in one day.” Rachel described that she has many different responsibilities that may all happen throughout the course of one day.

Another duty Rachel has is conducting classroom guidance. She reported “at the high school level we don't do as much.” Rather, “it's hard to get teacher's time.” Even though she cannot do much guidance, she described “meeting with our students [in] larger groups [to go] over different things that they need to know.” Rachel meets with students to disseminate information, but this time is limited due to not being able to get classroom time.

Rachel also has to conduct responsive services. At her school, they have a Signs of Suicide program. Rachel has to intervene most with students who are struggling with self-harm or suicidal ideation. In her school, Rachel reported school counselors are the first to be called if a crisis situation emerges but does not get involved in behavior issues.

To meet the academic needs of students, Rachel stated she looks “at the progress every five weeks, and our marking periods are every ten weeks.” She reported checking progress “to

make sure that everybody is on track for graduation and meets all the [state] requirements.” She also described meeting with students who have lower grades to check “in with them and see what’s going on.” Rachel reported she also has to ensure they have passed all required subject-level testing. “If a student is not on track, [I’ll] meet with them and their parents, or teachers and have parent/teacher meeting and come up with a plan for improvement.” Rachel’s academic role seems to include ensuring students are making passing grades, ensuring students are passing required tests, and creating a plan to assist students who are struggling.

Students have personal and social needs. Rachel described how school counselors meet these needs by making “ourselves very visible and let them know if they need to talk to somebody they know where to find us.” Rachel perceives that elementary and middle school counselors have done a good job of informing students about the role of a school counselor.

Rachel described how at her school:

students can come down to us anytime that need to, and our secretary is great. If it’s something that is an emergency, they talk to us right away. If it’s something that they just want to check in later, we’ll just schedule an appointment with her, and come in and talk to us later on.

Students can see the school counselors as they need. Rachel reported teachers and parents can also request a school counselor check on a student.

When Rachel was describing how she meets the career needs of her students, she reported “that’s an area that we can improve upon. I feel like a lot of focus is on the college side of it, and college isn’t for every student.” Rachel reported the community in which she lives does not have many “entry level jobs. It’s a high poverty, low socio-economic setting in this area.” Rachel disclosed her school hosted a “career day where one work source would come in and some different local employers and talk to students.” She also reported they have a notice board for possible job opportunities.

To improve meeting the career needs of students, the school purchased a:

college and career readiness software. [It] has different career interest inventories and personality assessments that they can take, and that can line up with maybe a future career that they might be interested in. Or education levels that are needed.

Rachel reported they started this program with the ninth-grade students, and they will have their account until they graduate. Another opportunity for career exposure is being able to attend a technical school. Rachel reported 30 to 40% of each junior and senior class attends the technical school.

Perceived preparation for the school-counseling position. Rachel reflected how her online program prepared her for being a school counselor. She stated “I think it prepared me well for it. [Gave me] all the course work that you needed.” Rachel reported being glad her online program required a practicum and two internships because it gave her “more time in the school setting.” She shared it also prepared her to “manage [her] time well, [and be] self-disciplined.” She perceives these qualities are important because “there is a million things coming at you at once. And if you’re not able to buckle down and do your job, there’s not someone breathing down your neck making sure that you are doing” your job. Rachel reported an online program requires a person to be able to work independently.

Ann’s description of the professional-school-counselor role and preparation. Ann is a school counselor at a K–12 school in a Midwest state. She has worked at this position for 8 years. She has held five prior positions. She has a total of 13 years of school-counseling experience.

Description of the school-counselor role. When Ann described her role, she described that in “elementary school [it is] primarily classroom guidance [and] on the high school side [it is] primarily career focus.” Ann shared that she views of her primary responsibilities differ depending on the grade level. She explained part of the reason she focuses on career with high

school students is “because that’s where our school gets reimbursed from the state, if I do career counseling. So most of our session are geared towards that.” Ann earns her school money for working with her students on career development. Even though her focus tends to be on careers, Ann shared she does “individual counseling for students who struggle.” Ann will work with students who are having a difficult time.

Ann described her typical day. Her typical day depends on whether she is working with her elementary or high school students. First, she described her time with her elementary students:

On my elementary days, a typical day would be classroom guidance. We have about two sections of every grade in elementary. On Tuesdays, I will have every grade, K–6, for an hour each. In between times is when I take individual counseling sessions with elementary students. And then on Thursdays, I do it all over again with the other section.

Ann has designated 2 days a week to working with elementary students. She works with the high school students on other days. She gave an example:

I’ll take juniors and seniors this week once. So like, Mondays first and second hour, I’ll have high school classes, and for the rest of the day, I’ll do individual guidance, I’ll do testing. I’ll do a lot of prep. Dealing with meetings. I try not to take elementary kids on my high school days, because the biggest complaint from my high schoolers is that I’m not accessible to them because my door is closed.

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday Ann will have two grades for classroom guidance and the rest of the day is spent working with individual students or handling her other responsibilities.

Ann stated “it’s mandatory in our school now, that juniors and seniors have to job shadow, and they’re graded on how they do. I organize it, but the English teacher is the one who holds them to it.” Ann shared she helps organize job-shadowing opportunities for junior and senior students at her school.

I do the interest inventory with them. Based on their interest inventory, we find a career that they’d like to job shadow. I get the okay and I find a site for them. They have to set up the time and the date that will work for them. They go to the job shadow, has to be for a half of a day or a full day. And then, they have to write a paper on it and do a speech

on it. And then, after they are done with that, I do that for every junior and senior. And then, when they are done with that, I set up mock job interviews, where I have community members come in and interview them as if they're applying for the job that they shadowed.

Ann divulged this project “is very time consuming, and so we do half of them in the spring and half of them in the fall.” Ann helps coordinated this project for about 50 students. Although “it does take a lot of time,” the students love doing it. Ann works with all students to help expose them to possible careers.

“Another one of [Ann’s] big projects is college tours.” There is only one college located where Ann works. She stated, “if we don’t take our kids somewhere to tour, they’re not going to get a chance to know what’s out there.” Ann described working with other school counselors in the area from small schools. They work together to:

coordinate where we get busses, and we usually take two buses and we do kind of a loop. And we alternate the colleges that [we] go to every other year. Next year we will go to five different colleges, in five different towns. We’ll hit two on the way to the other side of the state, and three on the way back. It will be an overnight stay for those that want to go. Our school is nice enough that they will pay for their rooms, but the kids have to pay for their meals. I ended up having probably about 20 kids from my school. We only take juniors and seniors.

Ann and other school counselors work to give juniors and seniors an opportunity to visit college campuses around their state.

Ann conducts classroom guidance with students. She shared that this year she changed the curriculum she uses that has grade-specific lessons. “In the past, I’ve bounced around and used different ones. This year, I stayed with the same. I did one curriculum for the upper elementary, and one for the lower elementary.” Ann reported having one curriculum was much better. However:

the challenge now is coming up with new material, because a lot of the curriculum is like ... this one is for grades K through 2. So, if I did it as Kindergarten, well I’ve got to come up with something different for them when they are first graders next year.

Ann explained she will have to work to create new lessons for each grade, so she has something different each year. However, she reported building curriculum for each grade instead of bouncing around, which “was very convenient for my sanity.”

Ann has responsive service duties at her school. When asked about them, she stated “any crisis situation at our school takes precedence over any of my other duties. The first day I meet with each class, I tell them that.” Ann wants students to know they take priority. She shared if she has to cancel going to a class, she tries to reschedule it, but it does not always work out. One problem she described having with students and responsive services “is when they don’t tell me how urgent it is, and then you find out later.” Ann reported students will tell her that they did not want to bother her, and she has to educate them there are some issues that need to be addressed immediately.

Academics is another ASCA-defined responsibility. Ann stated, “I’m not very involved with that at all.” She reported “the most academic would be testing.” Ann reported:

I’m also the testing coordinator. And so, going through the testing results with the students, so that they understand what they mean. That is probably the most academic that I get. But otherwise, that’s not really my role at my school.

Academics is not a responsibility that Ann has at her school. She described that her time is spent more on behavioral activities than academics.

To meet the personal and social needs of her students, Ann hopes she meets them “with the curriculum we that we use. It meets a lot of those needs and builds a lot of the skills that they need to be successful socially.” If a student needs more attention, Ann reported she will “do individual counseling.” Ann gets referrals for individual counseling from teachers and parents. If a student self-identifies, she advises them to speak with their teacher first. In the elementary school, Ann reported that she does not “like it when the kid just stops me in the hallway. Because a lot of times, its’ just one way that they are kind of wanting to tattle.” She reported she

tries to teach the students the difference between a tattle and a tell, and she does not respond to tattles. “I try to steer them towards knowing that I’m not a disciplinarian.” Ann works toward helping students understand her role as a school counselor. She shared she works with students who need more individualized attention, but she does not work with discipline.

Ann explained how she meets the career needs of her students by working with job shadowing and college visits. When asked directly how she meets the career needs of her students, Ann shared:

even at the elementary level, every year we talk about careers. I try to at least get one career unit in, and so it would be like four lessons on career. As they get towards the upper elementary, I’ll even start some interest inventories with them.

With her elementary students, Ann starts to talk about careers and having some understanding of their interests. As students reach junior high, “we take them to a neighboring bigger town, to a career fair. They’ll actually get to do some hands-on activities with different types of activities in different career fields. Listen to some speakers.” In junior high, they get more exposure to different careers. Sophomores and juniors get to go to a different career fair, “which is a little more serious. It still has hands-on activities, but it gets a little deeper into the type of education you will need for those careers.” Juniors and seniors participate in “job shadowing and the mock interviews. And college fairs get added to that too.” Ann shared she has a career fair at her school, but it is career specific. She focuses on careers in which students have expressed an interest following high school. Ann described working to meet the career needs of the different developmental ages.

Perceived preparation for the school-counseling position. When Ann reflected on how her program prepared for her roles and responsibilities as a professional school counselor, she identified:

the individual counseling side of it, that's probably what prepared me for the most. However, that's just a tiny piece of my job. We did not do much for classroom guidance at all, and I would stay that the most interaction I have with the students is as a group, in a classroom.

Ann described a focus on individual counseling, but it is not a duty on which she spends a great deal of time at her school. Ann reported she does a great deal of classroom guidance and would have liked to learn more about it. She explained her program did not really teach students about "the different curriculums that are out there, that you can use ... which ones are good, which ones aren't." Ann is creating curriculum for classroom guidance. Therefore, it can be inferred she would have benefited from more instruction on guidance curriculum in her program.

Ann also described the amount of time focused on meeting the career needs of her students. She stated:

some of the things that we do in the school systems, a lot of it is career related. There was nothing on preparing for careers. And so, that's just been kind of learn as you go. And so, that's kind of a frustration because that's what the older kids primarily come to me for, is some sort of guidance on ... "I don't know what I want to be." And, they don't prepare you how to do mock job interviews or teach them how to do resumes. Or interest inventories. You know, they touch on the interest inventories a little bit, but it's very brief. And I find that that consumes the majority of my time.

Ann reported she was not prepared for her the responsibility of meeting the career needs of her students.

Ann also noted "that the counseling program focuses on kids that have problems." Ann was learning skills to help students who struggle. She acknowledges some students do have problems and need individual attention. However, in her experience, "the majority don't. And they just need guidance, which that vocational piece comes in there. So, there needs to be a vocational piece. And I would include the job interviews, job shadowing and resume building."

Craig's description of the professional-school-counselor role and preparation. Craig is a high school counselor in a Midwest state. He has worked in this position for 2 years. He had no prior school counseling positions.

Description of the school-counselor role. Craig defined his role as “an advocate for students. Trying to be their go-to person in the school when they’re struggling with a variety of issues. The academic, the personal/social, that college post-secondary planning as well.” Craig described wanting to be the person in the school who supports students. Craig also reported that he is “resource for parents. I find more and more it’s just that email comes to me when parents don’t know what to do. So you become that point person to parents as well to help their kid succeed.” Craig seems to be the person who parents contact when they do not know who else to contact at the school. Along with students and parents, Craig disclosed:

I think also my role is to help teachers and students kind of navigate the individual needs that some of these kids have and to help make sure that people are seeing all sides of a person and the kid gets heard and the teacher gets heard as well.

Part of Craig’s role is helping students get necessary assistance and working with students and teachers to get needs met. Last, Craig explain that in the “big picture [he tries] to be [a] leader and an advocate for equity and achievement and fairness and equality at school.” Craig views his role as supporting and advocating for students as well as assisting parents and teachers.

Craig’s online program influenced the development of his role as a school counselor by trying:

to give us as much as possible a view of all those different facets. I think they tried to say “we’re going to give you a little bit of pieces on crisis and ethics and diversity and group counseling and career counseling.” So I think they tried to give us a big picture of every part so that we had some tools and some awareness that “hey when you go into the school you’re working at you’re got this tool box to draw from.”

Craig’s program influenced his role by exposing him to the different roles of being a school counselor and some tools on how to be a school counselor. Craig also acknowledged “that [the]

advocate role was pushed a lot in my program. The word advocate was, you're there for that kid whether it was being culturally competent, so you can really connect with them or being that supportive person." Craig reported that being an advocate was an important part of his role, and he emphasized advocacy in his program.

In Craig's role as a school counselor, Craig described what a typical day could look like as he performed his duties.

A typical day varies immensely. I think part of it is helping kids with their academic needs whether it's, hey I'm struggling in this class, I'm not connecting with the teacher. Trying to brainstorm and problem solve. A lot of problem solving about how they can be successful if they are failing a class or getting behind. Sometimes it's helping them with, you know, changing classes or registering whether they're going to try some type of online course or they're going to look at next future terms to make something better. It's a lot of problem solving.

Craig spends part of his day helping students with their academic needs. He supports students by coming up with possible solutions to their academic struggles. Craig also reported that "part of my day looks like collaboration with you know, the team I work with. Social worker, Dean, Principal collaborating on situations whether it's emotional, social kinds of things. Or other crisis that might be coming up." Craig works with his colleagues to consult on social or emotional situations. Craig also shared during the day he wants to be:

someone to bounce ideas off as these kids kind of explore what the future might hold. Especially for my juniors and seniors that are starting to think beyond high school. How do I ask the questions to get them thinking beyond just here? I want to make sure they're prepared for those next steps.

Craig described wanting to be a person who students can talk with about the future post high school. Craig described wanting to ensure students are prepared for whatever could happen in the future.

As part of the research study, Craig filled out a time-task analysis. This document was used as a way for Craig to track how he spent his time for 10 days. Craig's 10 days were from

October 23 to November 3, 2017. During this time, Craig described how his time was divided between guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, system support, and barriers. Craig's days differed between the amount of time spent on each duty except for guidance curriculum. He did not have this duty during this time. Some examples of his individual student planning included "helping a student change a class for a future term, developed a plan for struggling 9th grader, and worked with student wanting to change class." Craig also had some responsive services. He described these "duties as [individualized education program] student/parent meeting, student support team meeting, 9th grade interviews to meet new caseload, and student check-in on mental health." His system support duties included "staff meeting, and 504 evaluation meeting." Craig listed two things as barriers: "college transcript processing" and "meet with students absent for MYTime support." This is a sample of how Craig's time is spent performing school counseling duties.

Craig described how his fellow counselors and he complete classroom guidance at their high school. He reported:

Currently we have this group guidance we call where we'll meet with each grade level on one day in the fall, winter, and spring. We break our 100 kids up into four different classes and we meet individually with that group that's in our alphabet and present them with information that's pertinent. So whether it's a 10th grader thinking about what classes they should be registering for as juniors, we might do that in the winter. Seniors it's making sure they're ready in the fall to get their college applications. Juniors it's, "hey are you ready to leave here this spring and have that college list and have a plan for what you need?" So we try to hit them with those areas.

Craig explained that classroom guidance at his school is used to disseminate academic or college information. Craig is limited in performing classroom guidance often because "we don't have an English class that runs all year long, so I can't jump in more frequently." Craig described not having a consistent class to be able to use for classroom guidance. Therefore, he stated "a lot of time it's, hey let's hit them with 40 minutes of power point dense information." Craig

acknowledged that this method of classroom guidance is “not always the ideal,” and counselors are trying to figure out how to get information to students in a different way.

Craig learned about classroom guidance through “one class [where he] actually had to come up with three classroom guidance plans. We had to put together if we’re going to teach this subject, here is what it would look like.” Craig was able to practice designing a guidance lesson. Craig also reported “in our practicum and internships we then had to implement some plans and reflect on their effectiveness.” After designing lessons, he was able to practice some guidance lessons. Craig described he was “never videotaped to be observed in that though. I think I had my elementary internship advisor watch me with one of those second step lessons just to give me some feedback one time.” Craig received some feedback from an internship supervisor but not anyone from his program.

Craig described his responsive services:

Individuals coming down and saying, “hey I need help.” You know, they’re in tears, they’re having a panic attack or anxiety. So then it’s more, “hey I’m going to work with you one on one and talk you through it. Try to explore how do we help get you back to neutral and feel like you can get back on with your day.” Obviously if it’s more serious than it’s, ok what collaboration do I need to do with maybe a social worker or a principal or calling home to parents or whatnot.

Craig helps students who are experiencing distress and need help. He tries to help them be able to continue their school day and refers them to other staff, if necessary. He also shared at his school:

We also have a team meeting once a week where a bunch of the counselors, social workers will gather together and we’ll put names on a spreadsheet and we’ll say, “alright let’s talk about some of these cases that we’re maybe struggling with that we want to get some others inputs on and so that might be more of a discussion based piece.”

Craig reported the team works together to help students who need assistance. Craig explained he “also serve[s] on an intervention network where we’re trying to bring out more ways to support kids in the classroom level. How do we empower teachers to use different resources when kids

are struggling?” Craig described how he is helping to create something for teachers, so they can better support their students.

Craig helps students with their academics. Craig reported:

for kids who are struggling I try to get some grade reports every week about Ds and Fs and try to call down kids who need some extra support. Whether that’s just as some encouragement or trying to problem solve and brainstorm how do I support them.

He also described being “the 504 coordinator so obviously for kids who maybe have some more needs I try to develop a 504 that can help them [by] provid[ing] some accommodations for what they might need.” Craig also revealed:

some of the academic pieces are just making sure kids are properly placed in the right classes. Some of that’s discussing and sitting down and doing a two, three, four-year plan with them to make sure they’re pursuing the rigor or the appropriate levels of classes that they might need.

Craig meets with students to ensure they are taking the appropriate classes for their specific academic plan.

Craig reflected on how his program prepared him to meet the academic needs of his students:

I don’t know if there was a ton of training on that unfortunately. I think it was maybe a little bit of, how do you use some different theories to get them to think differently maybe about their academics and how to approach to maybe empower them to make change. But in terms of equipping me to help a kid with study skills, organization skills, there wasn’t much of that. Even course awareness and understanding the rigors of courses that some of these kids can take very little.

Craig’s program did not offer much instruction on how to meet the academic needs of students.

When Craig is working to meet the personal/social needs of students, he reported:

it’s more just connecting with them. Whether it’s responding to their emails, calling them down if they’re having a tough day, or vice versa being available to meet with them. Sometimes I’ll put a kid on my calendar for three or four weeks to continually check in if I know they’re struggling with some personal/social issues. Or how do I refer them out to more consistent therapy if that’s the case? Utilize the resources that might be available to them.

Craig meets students' personal and social needs by having a relationship with them. He works to be available to students and refer them to other services as needed.

Craig's program taught him about meeting the personal and social needs of his students:

through some of our crisis training, some of our school counseling courses. How do we respond to kids who are hurting? How do we respond to kids who might need just more support? So some of that was role play that we'd worked on in our [residencies]. Or you know, different discussions posts dealing with helping kids with confidentiality and those kinds of issues.

He had two classes that had instruction on meeting the personal/social needs of students as well as practicing skills during his residencies.

Students also need help with career development. Craig reported at his school they meet the career needs of students through "a career class that focused a little bit more on inventories and some of the career exploration tools per say. So I think that was somewhat helpful."

However, Craig reported:

I don't feel like I'm always able. There's so many different careers out there so for me to totally be aware of how to maybe make those connections for kids, I don't feel super prepared on that. I mean, I can talk to them a little bit about well how that might align with a certain major. But to get these kids thinking long term career, sometimes that's hard. And some of those careers that maybe will be out there are going to be totally different. So that's a hard part too...maybe have some interest inventories and tools but making those connections have been hard.

Craig shared he has knowledge of career inventories, but he struggles with help students with career connections.

Perceived preparation for the school-counseling position. Upon reflection about how his program prepared him to meet the career needs of students, Craig stated "I think they tried to get us to look at different inventories and look at tools that maybe career counselors use." He had some exposure to some tools used in career counseling. He does not "remember at ton of role playing with that." He revealed that:

there wasn't much on college, when I think post-secondary. A lot of my kids are going to college here. So I didn't have a lot of experience with college visits and college. Understanding how college admissions and all of that works.

Craig reported he works a great deal with students who are attending college, but his program did not prepare him to help students apply to college.

After Craig described how he performs his role as a professional school counselor, the researcher asked Craig to reflect on how his program prepared him. He reported:

I think it gave me a lot of different maybe, a tool box with a lot of exposure to different tools. And a lot of different opportunities to kind of learn about how school counselors might interact. So in terms of the theoretical and maybe the academic pieces of what a school counselor does, I think I got a lot of good exposure to that. But then just the applicability and you know, what that day to day looks like I think that's maybe where it was maybe not as effective. I'm going to jump into this job where I've got 89% of my students going on to a four-year college, and I've got to be able to figure out how to help them and write letters of recommendation and help them figure out their college lists and make sure that they're taking the right classes so that they can get into some of these more selective schools. And get those grad requirements. Some of that seems sometimes more specific to my, maybe a building or a community, so I think I've learned a lot more on the job. But I think the training I got maybe allowed that learning to happen quicker. Because I had some of those theoretical models. I had things I could draw upon. Conversations about confidentiality and ethics and diversity. So that now when I'm sitting in here I can draw upon that.

Craig described receiving a foundation in how to be an effective school counselor. His program gave him tools to help be successful. However, he must continue to build on the foundation to meet the needs of the students at his school. When the researcher summarized that he had a good foundation but his program was unable to prepare him completely for his position, he said:

And I've got to imagine that across the country roles like that vary and even levels right? Whether you're at an elementary or middle. So maybe that's challenging to prepare everybody for their specific roles. But yeah, it's kind of like teaching. I felt like I had a good foundation to be a teacher, but it wasn't until I got into the classroom and started learning the content of what I'm teaching that I felt that, ok after a year or two now I can be a good teacher. I'm feeling the same way. It takes a couple years to be in this role to now become a good counselor versus just having that foundation from an online program.

Craig acknowledged that each school and grade level has their own specific needs, so it would be difficult for an online program to prepare everyone perfectly for their specific school and role.

Craig reflected he believes it will take some time to become a good school counselor due to having to build on the foundation his program gave him.

If Craig could change anything about his program, he reported he would make adjustments to:

the cost. Not make it so expensive. Second thing would be, you know, I think having that maybe some more opportunities for some synchronous communication at times. Maybe allowing for encouraging some of that once in a while. But also just having that, yeah, having some more diverse pedagogy, using that term. I mean having a multi-modal instruction that's sprinkled throughout your class so you do get a little bit of everything. Especially to reach the diverse learners. I mean, as a teacher I know that people learn differently and I feel bad for people who can't learn the way they forced you to.

Craig would have liked his program to be less expensive. Craig also reported he would have liked more variety in the type of instruction used in his program. He believes the program was not meeting the needs of different-style learners.

Craig described his role as a school counselor. Craig wants to be a person at the school with whom students feel comfortable reaching out for assistance with any academic, personal/social, and career needs. His program prepared him by helping him gain a solid foundation to build on as his school-counselor knowledge and experience grow.

Researcher Perspective

As the researcher interviewed participants, it was important for her to listen to their experience and not interject her own experience being trained as a school counselor or her experience as a professional school counselor. As the researcher analyzed the transcripts to determine themes, it was important that the researcher was aware of any preconceived notions or bias about online education that could influence the lens of how the researcher interpreted each participant's online experience and their individual perceptions of how their program prepared

them to be professional school counselors. The researcher also had to be careful about overidentifying with participants when they expressed struggles as school counselors. To ensure the researcher accurately represented each narrative, the researcher read each transcript several times to verify the researcher was including all important pieces of each narrative to support each theme.

Narrative Summary

All participants shared their individual stories about earning a master's degree from an online CACREP-accredited program. Participants also disclosed how they perceived they were or were not prepared to be a professional school counselor. All participants' narratives started in the same place. They all explained why they chose to attend an online program versus a brick-and-mortar face-to-face program. Five of the six participants had similar reasons. One participant differed but was glad she made this decision because she moved to another state during her program.

Once participants reflected on why they began an online program, they began to explain their individual experiences with faculty and peers, likes and dislikes about the program, and how they learned the skills necessary to be professional school counselors. Participants varied in their individual narratives about how they explained their program and what was important for them to learn.

After reflecting on their individual experience of an online program, participants explained how they perceived their program prepared them. Participants told the story of their role as a professional school counselor. As participants told their story, they shared how they felt the program either prepared or did not prepare them for specific school-counseling duties. The preparation or lack of preparation depended on where the participant worked and what

responsibilities and duties they had at their specific school. The context of where they worked greatly influenced whether they believed they were prepared or unprepared. Table 6 provides a brief summary of the themes that developed and the data that support each theme.

Themes developed from participants' narratives. The themes that developed to answer Research Question 1 about online education were access to higher education, interpersonal relationships, student diversity, and independent learning. Participants explained how online education was the best option for pursuing a master's degree in school counseling. The next theme that developed was interpersonal relationships. Participants explained how relationships developed or did not develop with faculty and peers. Participants also explained how student diversity impacted their experience. Then, participants described how they perceived their learning to be self-directed, which led to the theme of independent learning.

The theme that developed for Research Question 2 was that context had an important impact on how participants perceived they were or were not prepared for their position. Each participant described individual roles and responsibilities of being a school counselor. Through their descriptions, they reflected on the areas for which they were prepared and areas where they could have benefited from more instruction. Therefore, their perceptions of being prepared depended on their individual context.

Table 8
Data Summary Table

Thematic label	Data
Access to Higher education	<p>“I didn’t feel that with my lifestyle at that time I was doing this I could go to a brick and mortar. There wasn’t anything near me that was CACREP accredited.” —Larry</p> <p>“convenience primarily. I live in [a state] and there are no—very few opportunities that don’t require moving and so I was looking for the ability to get, to stay where I was and get my degree.” —Kathy</p>
Interpersonal relationships	<p>“intentional about [developing relationships].” (faculty relationships) —Rachel</p>
Faculty	<p>“for most of them it was, you know, medium to minimal. I mean it was, you had some dialogue and rapport within the course room that we were using. But there wasn’t a ton of connectedness” (faculty relationships) —Craig</p>
Peers	<p>“see people year to year and so you develop a little bit more of a relationship with them than if it was just through discussion boards.” (Peer relationships) —Ann</p>
Student diversity	<p>“some of them already had like their mental health counseling degree. Some had marriage and family, some were teachers but they wanted to go back into counseling. So, you kind of had a wide mix of people who were a part of the program, which is nice.” —Rachel</p> <p>“I was able to be exposed to all sorts of different cultures and things that I would never think of.” —Ann</p>
Independent learning	<p>“online program in a lot of ways you have to teach yourself because you’re not going in and you’re not listening to a professor and my undergrad was face-to-face and so that was a new experience for me but you’re not going and listening to a professor talk so you can’t like go into a classroom and zone out.” —Brian</p> <p>she “usually wasn’t there, but she came just to satisfy the amount of minutes that I needed to be observed.” —Ann</p>
Perceived preparation for school counseling position	<p>“allowed me to think outside the box.” —Larry</p> <p>“I wish there had been a little more preparation about individual counselors and how they might reach out to different people to help with questions that arise in a practice that could have an ethical [component].” —Kathy</p> <p>“didn’t really help prepare me for the position, but it helped refine what I’m doing.” - Brian</p> <p>“I think it prepared me well for it. [Gave me] all the course work that you needed.” — Rachel</p> <p>“the individual counseling side of it, that’s probably what prepared me for the most. However, that’s just a tiny piece of my job. We did not do much for classroom guidance at all, and I would stay that’ the most interaction I have with the students is as a group, in a classroom.” —Ann</p> <p>“I think it gave me a lot of different maybe, a tool box with a lot of exposure to different tools. And a lot of different opportunities to kind of learn about how school counselors might interact. So in terms of the theoretical and maybe the academic pieces of what a school counselor does, I think I got a lot of good exposure to that. But then just the applicability and you know, what that day to day looks like I think that’s maybe where it was maybe not as effective.” —Craig</p>

Chapter V: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret participants' experiences of being trained and graduating from a CACREP online school-counseling master's program and determine how their training prepared them for their current role as a school counselor. The research was important because almost two thirds of college and university administrators believe it is likely that the majority of students will take at least one online class in the next five years (Allen & Seaman, 2014). This research study began to understand and represent the narratives of participants who attended a CACREP accredited online school counseling program and are professional school counselors.

The information presented in this chapter includes a summary of the research; implications of this research for online counselor education, future professional school, counselors, and recommendations for future research. The researcher summarizes the results of the participants' narratives, how they created meaning about their experience of earning an online master's degree, and their perceptions of their preparation to be professional school counselors. The researcher also discusses the implications of the research in relation to online counselor education and future professional school counselors. Finally, the researcher offers recommendations for future research related to online education and training professional school counselors. Participants told their story of earning a school counseling master's degree from an online CACREP-accredited program. It is important to understand that participants have their own truth about the experience, and how they created meaning from the experience.

Summary of Results

Six professional school counselors participated in this research study. The researcher asked participants about their experiences attending an online program. Participants shared their

narratives of this experience. The researcher initially asked about what led each to choose an online program. The subsequent questions in the interview protocol were about specific aspects of online training and also their roles as professional school counselors. Each participant told a narrative and created meaning by reflecting on the experience. The researcher analyzed each narrative through the lens of social constructionism in order to understand how each narrative impacted the shared meaning of attending an online CACREP program, and the way in which it prepared participants for their roles as professional school counselors. Through these narratives common themes emerged. The themes included access to higher education, interpersonal relationships, student diversity, independent learning, and perceived preparation for their school-counseling position.

Access to Higher Education

Based on participant narratives, online education provided opportunities for students to attend institutions of higher education. Some participants were geographically isolated from a traditional face-to-face program, and online programs offered an opportunity to attend an institution of higher education (Quinn & Barth, 2014; Roberts, 1996). Online education seemed to fill a void for those who live in areas without a traditional face-to-face program. Online education also allowed a participant to make geographic change without interrupting her education. Quinn and Barth (2014) reported it is important that people have access to quality education regardless of geographic location. Participants explained how online programs presented opportunities to those who live in rural areas or do not live in the United States. Online education is a valuable resource for people who want to attend an institution of higher education but live in an area without many options. Participants felt they received a solid

foundation for becoming professional school counselors. Therefore, it seems that online education is a viable option for people who want an education without location restrictions.

Online education offered an opportunity to participants who had lifestyle limitations. Participants disclosed they had an opportunity to attend a face-to-face program, but it would have required them to change location. Moving was not an option due to needing to maintain employment or family responsibilities. Online programs offered increased flexibility (Lei & Gupta, 2010). This flexibility allowed students to continue with their current employment and still attend school. Participants also expressed that time flexibility helped with family responsibilities. They were able to work on school assignments after their children went to bed. Online education provided an option for people to choose when they wanted to do schoolwork and balance family responsibilities. This was a valuable option for people who wanted to earn a master's degree but had lifestyle constraints.

Interpersonal Relationships

Students may feel isolated or disconnected from their peers and professors while earning an online degree (Barr & Miller, 2013). Students who access online education do not have the same opportunity to make connections with peers and faculty as students who attend traditional face-to-face programs (Bejerano, 2008). This is attributed to the fact they are not in the same physical space as their faculty and peers. Most interactions are through technology, where students communicate mostly through writing. Participants in this research study shared the methods by which they developed relationships and connections with their faculty and peers. The relationships developed differently because they were not sharing physical space. Participants could choose their level of interaction due to the online format whereas students in a

traditional face-to-face program have more expectations to interact with their professors and peers.

Online students needed support from their professors (Lee et al., 2011), which means they needed to have relationships. Participants described how relationships developed through their face-to-face and online interactions. The meaning of these relationships varied among participants. However, they all expressed that having a relationship with their faculty was important to them. These relationships seemed to be more important than their relationships with their peers. This finding was unexpected because in the researcher's training her relationships with her peers was equal to if not greater in importance than the relationship with her faculty.

Participants placed emphasis on developing a deeper relationship with faculty when they were able to see their faculty members or spend time in the same geographic location. Being in the same place seemed to offer new opportunities to connect and learn. Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2012) completed a study about the need for rapport in online-education programs. In the study, they found ways that faculty members developed rapport with their students such as creating time for students to have nonacademic conversations/interactions with their professors. Participant narratives supported this notion. It was important to note that seeing their faculty and sharing the same geographical space was a valuable part of developing relationships. Participants also reported appreciation for faculty members knowing their names and being able to ask about their individual lives. It was also noted participants felt connected to faculty members who displayed authenticity and shared personal experience with students. It seemed having a more personal relationship with their faculty impacted students' satisfaction with their online program.

Lim and Kim (2003) explained students may feel a lack of emotional connection to learning because they experience limited face-to-face contact. While five of the participants felt they developed at least a small connection with their faculty, one participant had a different experience with developing connections. He described that he felt disconnected with faculty, which impacted how much he engaged with the learning process. Although he did not have a great sense of connectedness to his professors, he did have some positive experiences with his faculty members. This participant's narrative demonstrated the importance of the relationships between faculty and students. Without relationships, students may not feel engaged in their classes, which may also affect students' performance. It is important to understand how students can be affected by a lack of connectedness with their faculty because it highlights the importance of relationships in the learning environment.

In their narratives, participants described their relationships with their classmates. Opinions varied of how important peer relationships were to the participants. Some participants expressed connecting with their peers. While another participant, acknowledged his disconnect with his peers and would purposefully not engage with some of his peers. Most peer interactions occurred in the discussion post format. Participants' narratives demonstrated how the use of this technology helped develop relationships or allowed students to choose to not interact with all their peers. This is a significant difference between an online program and a traditional program. In a traditional program, students may engage more with their classmates because they are in close proximity. Whereas in an online format, students have more limited ways to interact with their peers. Therefore, online students can be selective in who they want to interact with and ignore the rest of their peers.

It was a surprise to find that participants had such a mixed views about their relationships with their peers because the researcher relied heavily on peers for emotional and academic support. The other participants in this study had positive interactions with peers, but it seemed their peers had less of an impact on their experience than their faculty. The narratives demonstrated how participants interacted with their peers, some appreciated discussions when they had synchronous meetings. The tone of how significant their peer relationships were to them was not equal to the importance of their relationships with and impact from faculty members.

Student Diversity

Online education offers opportunities to nontraditional students (Bejerano, 2008; Reese, 2015). Student diversity appeared to impact three participants. These three participants highlighted the importance of how the online setting offered student diversity that a traditional program may not offer. Rachel, Ann, and Craig said other students varied in age, previous career experiences, and locations around and outside the United States. Diversity added value to their programs because they gained perspectives from people who lived in a different context. Participants believed if they had attended an institution of higher education in their state, they would not have experienced as much diversity due to the lack of perceived diversity in their particular location. The diversity reported in the online programs allowed student-to-student learning through the different backgrounds and perspectives.

Three participants perceived student diversity to be an important distinction from a face-to-face program. They each believed online programs offered greater opportunity for diverse students to interact. As a school counselor, it is vital to work with all students. Diversity offered in online programs may help students learn how to engage with all students. However, without

comparing online programs to traditional programs, an assumption cannot be generalized that students benefit more from diversity in an online program because it can also be possible for students to not engage with peers due to the online format.

Independent Learning

Participants believed online education required them to be more independent than a traditional face-to-face program. Participants perceived they were more independent because they completed a significant amount of research to support their discussion post responses and to complete projects. The learning the participants described was different than a traditional course because most of the work seemed to be individual and had limited whole group engagement. In the discussion board, students could decide with whom they interacted within the class. Whereas in a traditional class, there are whole group discussions and presentations where the student is interacting with the whole class.

Online learners must manage their own time and learning (Allen & Seaman, 2014; del Valle & Duffy, 2009; Wang et al., 2008). The participants perceived online education was independent because the professor was not lecturing and giving reminders. Online learners have to be self-motivated and organized to complete their assignments on time. It cannot be determined if they must be more self-motivated or organized than traditional face-to-face students. However, it is important to note that participants perceive they had more responsibility due to the lack of professor direction. Participants perceived they had more self-discipline to complete coursework due to time flexibility. Since class attendance was not a requirement, participants decided when they wanted to complete their coursework. While this benefited many, it could also be problematic because it could become easy to procrastinate on projects and on class assignments. It is important for people who are considering an online school counseling

master's degree to examine the amount of time needed to complete coursework, especially individual coursework. Participants stated there were some group projects, but most assignments were independent. If people are seeking greater interaction with peers and faculty during the learning process, they may need to consider a traditional face-to-face program or a synchronous learning environment. Asynchronous online education may not be the best fit due to limited interaction with both peers and instructors. Also, participants' narratives demonstrated how vital it is that students can manage their time, stay organized, and be willing to seek help when needed. These are skills all students need, but participants stressed they were even more important in an online program because most work was performed independently.

Two participants differed in opinions about the independent nature of online learning. One surmised that it assisted him in engagement. Because he was responsible for his learning, he utilized a more active role instead of sitting and listening to a lecture, which he described to be a more passive way of learning. However, the other participant thought the learning process became repetitive, and he completed the minimum requirements to obtain the desired grade. These two diverse opinions about the style of learning are crucial to understand. Students who begin an online program with the assumption that it will be similar to a traditional face-to-face class may be disappointed or frustrated. Students who comprehend the independent nature of online education may be more satisfied with their experience. Opinions of independent learning may differ in synchronous programs.

Although participants reflected on their learning and how engaged they were with the process of learning, they also described their supervision or the lack of supervision they received while in their school counseling practicums and internships. It is critical for school counseling

professors to educate supervisors on their expectations for supervision such as the time the student and the school counselor need to meet every week.

Practicums and internships allowed participants to apply what they learned in their classes. Supervision is a central part of practicums and internships. Supervisors guide students and help with the develop their skills. Without proper supervision, students have difficulty identifying their strengths and areas of needed improvement because they are not receiving necessary feedback.

It is also significant to note that school counselors may have been trained with the ASCA National Model, whereas older school counselors may not have received training about the ASCA National Model. These differences could affect what the supervisor expects of the school counseling practicum or internship student. It would be beneficial for programs to ensure the supervisors have an understanding of ASCA and the recommended duties for a school counselor as described by ASCA.

Supervisors have a crucial role in the development of students learning to be school counselors because they influence the students' identity as school counselors. Programs have an obligation to students to ensure quality supervisors. They can offer quality supervision by training their supervisors on appropriate supervision methods.

Perceived Preparation for the School-Counseling Position

Participants explained they were satisfied with the experience of being trained online. They chose this path to attain access to higher education. They noted how their interactions with professors and peers impacted their experience. Participants described how online learning may have differed from a face-to-face program. After reflecting on the experience, participants considered how their online program prepared them to be professional school counselors.

Participants reflected on how their program influenced their role as a professional school counselor. The six school-counselor participants represented six different schools and school districts, five different states, and two countries. The school counselors described how they performed the duties of a professional school counselor. The researcher asked participants how they viewed their role as a school counselor on a typical day using guidance curriculum, responsive-service duties, academic, personal/social, and career needs of students, and finally, their perception of how prepared they were to be professional school counselors. Participants told their stories about their role as a school counselor.

Participants acknowledged the online program had courses that introduced them to the roles and duties of being a professional school counselor. Participants described how their programs utilized the ASCA National Model to educate them on how to be professional school counselors. They also shared how they spent their time by filling out a time-task analysis. Five of the six participants were recruited toward the end of their school year. The sixth participant was recruited in the fall. Participants shared that their days looked different based on the time of the year and the requirements during that time. The researcher instructed participants to track ten school days and mark how they were spending their time throughout the day.

Based on the time-task analysis participants shared, they were spending the majority of their time working directly with students whether it was whole group through guidance lessons or doing individual student planning or counseling. While the participants demonstrated they spend most of their time in direct service to students, they also shared they had some barriers in completely adhering to the ASCA National Model. In three participants' narratives, they shared they had a hard time completing guidance because it was hard to get time in teachers' classrooms. One participant also shared that he is responsible for the school safety plan. He

shared this could be a barrier because he has to spend a lot of time on it, but he also views it as part of his role. This is not an ASCA approved duty, but the participant shared it is an important duty for his school context. Participants also shared that they were responsible for testing. This is not an ASCA approved duty, but it is one that is required by their districts. Overall, participants tried to follow ASCA guidelines. However, they experienced some barriers based on the requirements of their context.

ASCA has school counselor competencies. These competencies are separated in five categories: school counseling programs, foundations, management, delivery, and accountability (ASCA, 2012). The researcher focused on the delivery competencies. Participants were asked about the services they provided for students.

Several participants acknowledged having a good foundation to build on, once they became school counselors. Participants disclosed the need for additional training to be more effective as school counselors. Participants acknowledged they could benefit from better development in their counseling skills. It is crucial that school counselors have well-developed counseling skills because an ASCA competency states that the school counselor “demonstrates an ability to provide counseling for students during times of transition, separation, heightened stress, and critical change” (ASCA, 2012, pg. 157). Participants revealed there seemed to be a gap in their training in regard to individual and group counseling skills. Participants explained there was a focus on person-centered counseling for the development of counseling skills; therefore, participants learned the basics but lacked training beyond these basic skills.

Another area of needed preparation was in career development. ASCA (2012) recommended that professional school counselors “[understand] career opportunities, labor market trends and global economics and use various career assessment techniques to help

students understand their abilities and career interests” (pg. 157). Participants disclosed they needed more training on the practical skills of helping students make post-high school plans. For example, they needed education about how to help prepare a student for college and how to apply to college. This implied that online programs may teach career knowledge but need to improve how they teach students to apply the knowledge. Students could benefit from having a class that is specifically focused on school counselors and the role they have in career development.

The ASCA National Model required professional school counselors to “[describe] the benefits of a comprehensive school counseling program for all stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, administrators, school board, department of education, school counselors, counselor educators, community stakeholders and business leaders” (ASCA, 2012, pg. 149). While it is important for school counselors to be able to educate people about their comprehensive school counseling program and their duties, a participant explained that it was difficult to work as a lone school counselor because other professionals at the school did not have a clear understanding of the school counselor role. School counselors would benefit if there was information added to teacher and principal training about how to best use the school counselor to help students and other stakeholders. This could assist with understanding the important role professional school counselors have in a school setting.

Implications for the Education of School Counselors

The narratives told by the participants offered insight about the experience of earning a master’s in school counseling from an online CACREP-accredited program. These stories allow for new understanding and awareness of this experience, discerning how online programs prepare professional school counselors. It is significant to note that the challenges reported by

the participants in this study may or may not be indicative of or the result of attending an online program, but they do represent participants' concerns about their graduate experience and need to be addressed.

Implications for Online Counselor Education

Online programs continue to provide an opportunity for people who want to pursue higher education but cannot attend a brick-and-mortar program because of no other option, or they choose not to attend a traditional program because an online program would fit their needs better. Administrators and faculty should understand that students who attend online programs may have made this choice due to geographic isolation or lifestyle limitations. Geographic isolation may have an impact on the types of technology and resources students can access during their programs. If an online program requires students to have specific technology, online programs could offer rentals to students. Lifestyle may also impact the amount of time students can spend completing schoolwork and the time of day they complete the work. Participants who had children mentioned needing to complete schoolwork after their children went to bed. Therefore, a traditional program or a synchronous online program may not meet the needs of students who need the time flexibility that an asynchronous online program offers. If an asynchronous program requires students to have synchronous meetings, they need to be considerate of students who may have full-time jobs and/or families, and they would need to meet after traditional work hours.

Students online do not have the same access to faculty. It could be valuable for online programs to make professors more accessible to students such as requiring professors to meet with their students face-to-face more often. The requirements could include professors having face-to-face meetings with students to discuss feedback on important projects and papers. Not

only could this assist with giving more in-depth feedback but also developing a connection. Faculty could gain an understanding of how their students react to feedback, and students could learn more about the faculty's expectations of their classroom performance. Face-to-face meetings would also allow students to ask questions about the feedback to ensure they understand how to incorporate it into other assignments and projects. Another possibility is that the professors could offer times that they would be available for face-to-face web meetings. The professor could also be available through an instant messaging system. Students send messages to professors and receive an instant response unlike an email that may not get answered immediately. These times could be similar to office hours. However, students would still have to schedule meetings if they wanted face-to-face contact because the professor would not be able to have an open video meeting for students. It would not be appropriate for students to interrupt other students who are meeting with the professor. It is also important to have a scheduled meeting instead of an open meeting because some students may want a private meeting. The office hours could also be used as tutoring time. The professor could host a web meeting for students to join to receive help on an assignment.

Based on the participants' narratives, it was inferred that there was a barrier in access to their faculty. Participants explained there was communication between students and faculty, but this communication was generally over e-mail. This speaks to the difference in access to professors in an online program versus a face-to-face program. In a face-to-face program, professors have office hours where a student could drop by to speak with their professors whether it was about academic or nonacademic topics. Students in a face-to-face program also can meet with their faculty before or after a class to discuss class assignments or review feedback on assignments.

Relationships are a significant part of counselor education because relationships can have a profound impact on how students remember their experience in a specific school or course and also have an effect on the mastery of the subject (Smith, 2011). The development of relationships in an online program differ from relationship development in a traditional face-to-face program. The main difference was that students did not have many opportunities to engage with their faculty face-to-face. While participants shared their faculty was accessible to them through email and phone calls, there was still the barrier of limited face-to-face contact, which made it more difficult to form a connection. Participants acknowledged that having relationships with their faculty had a positive influence on their learning. Based on this information, it is imperative that faculty work to develop a relationships with their students. Some participants expressed that they connected best when their faculty was intentional in knowing them and also when participants could see and interact with their faculty in-person. Therefore, faculty need to be prepared to get to know their students on a more personal level. To develop these relationships, professors could have an informal face-to-face meeting at the beginning of the course. This meeting could take place either on campus for people who can travel or through video software. This meeting would give students a chance to talk with their professor about nonacademic topics. Institutions can also support faculty in developing relationships by assigning professors to multiple courses throughout students' course plan of study. This would help with relationship development because students have multiple opportunities over time to get acquainted with their faculty and feel connected to them. It is vital for online programs to educate their faculty about how to develop relationships through technology.

Programs can educate professors by offering webinars that are focused on online education and how professors can best engage students in the learning process. During these

webinars, the professors would learn why relationships are important and the different technologies the institution possesses that can be utilized to assist with relationship building. The school counseling program can also hold staff meetings through a web-conferencing program. During these meetings, the faculty can share how they are developing relationships in their online classes. An example of how professors and students could develop a relationship was explained through one participant's narrative. One participant explained prior to the class beginning the students all created a video introducing themselves. The professor and the students could view the introductory videos. They could comment on the video post to begin a dialogue about something they found they had in common with the student or something they found interesting about their video. The professor could take time to comment on all students' videos to acknowledge watching them. The professor could also make a video for students to get to know him which can help with developing a more personal connection. Programs could also invest in software that would allow face-to-face meetings between students and faculty. The software could be used for videoed lectures, short meetings between faculty and students, student-to-student interactions, or synchronous class meetings.

An additional method that programs can utilize to provide opportunities for faculty and students to connect is during the required residencies, because students and faculty are able to be in the same geographic location. During residencies, programs can set aside time for students and faculty to connect over nonacademic activities. The online programs' websites do not explicitly detail what is done during residences for other programs to model after or the types of nonacademic interactions offered by the program. While one participant shared his school offered some opportunities for nonacademic interaction, the researcher cannot disclose the school due to confidentiality. One participant described that during his residency one day was

set aside for students and faculty to interact through a variety of nonacademic activities. They could participate in rafting, shopping, or other activities. He reported these times were valuable because he was able to get to know his professors on a more personal level, and they were able to get to know him. To have a deeper understanding of the types of nonacademic interactions participants have with their faculty would require interviewing students and professors of the programs. During the residencies, there could also be an evening where faculty and students could dine together. The time at dinner would provide an opportunity for professors and students to interact in a less formal way.

Participants appreciated when faculty were authentic and also had experience in the topic they were teaching about in the program. This idea was supported by research completed by Reese (2015) who suggested for an online class to be successful, it must include collaboration, authenticity, and communication between students and faculty and peer-to-peer. Authenticity can be demonstrated by faculty when they model being a life-long learner. They share their experience but that does not mean they know everything about a topic. It can also be modeled by being willing to demonstrate their humanity. Which means, they should not present as being perfect. For example, if a professor is videoing a lecture, the professor does not edit out their mistakes but keeps going just like they would in a face-to-face class. They also shared when they did not know the answer, but they were willing to look for the answer. By modeling this behavior, it could free students to be more authentic and willing to take more educational risks such as trying something new or admitting when they do not understand a topic.

However, a lack of relationship and connection can also have an impact on student learning. For example, counseling students are encouraged to do self-exploration and enhance personal development (Chui et al., 2014). One participant explained he did some self-

exploration; however, it seemed to be limited. It may have been limited because of the online format of his program and not feeling connected to his faculty. It requires time to get to know someone and have an understanding about their histories and also areas of needed growth. It also takes time for students to trust their faculty enough to be vulnerable and open to feedback about an area where they need to do some personal work. This knowledge underscores the importance of developing a meaningful relationship between students and faculty.

The participants expressed mixed opinions on the value of developing relationships with their peers. Some connected with peers while another participant did not feel connected to his peers. However, some participants described their peers brought diversity to their program. They expressed how this diversity added value to their program because they were exposed to different opinions and cultures. They may not have gotten the same exposure if they attended a traditional face-to-face program in their state. Online programs can use this diversity by developing assignments or encouraging discussions for peer-to-peer learning. Faculty need to be prepared to work with students who live all over the United States and possibly outside of the United States. It is also important for faculty to be prepared to work with different student perspectives. Professors who teach online classes should be allowed and supported by their college or university to attend conferences with a multicultural or diversity focus. Programs can also allow students to learn from other students. At the beginning of a multicultural classes, professors could have students share their cultural perspective. The cultural perspective could include how the students' ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, geographic region, religious or spiritual beliefs, and other cultural aspects that may impact their interaction with society. This assignment allows students to become more aware of their own cultural perspective as well as allow others to learn from students who may have a different cultural perspective. Multicultural

awareness can also be developed during supervision. Professors can encourage students to share how they are being multiculturally aware at their school sites and also share how the cultures of their region may influence how school counseling is practiced at their school. This discussion allows others to hear different perspectives.

To help faculty understand how to learn about the different ways to disseminate content and evaluate students, institutions could offer mentoring to those who teach online courses. Allen and Seaman (2010) interviewed administrators of higher education institutions. Of the administrators who responded, 59% of the administrators reported offering informal mentoring while 40% of administrators offered formal mentoring (Allen & Seaman, 2010). The formal mentoring could pair an experienced and effective online professor with a new online professor. Mentoring meetings can be scheduled once a month over a web-based conferencing program if the people are not in the same geographic region. The meetings may have specific topics they address such how to create relationships, teaching methods, creating assessments, and other topics specific to online education. There would also be time for the mentees to ask questions and consult with their mentors about their classes. Formal mentoring could provide an opportunity for new faculty to learn how to best construct their classes.

The online format of courses is different from a traditional course. Therefore, professors change how they structure learning for achieving higher order learning, teaching practices, developing assessments, and creating instructional objectives from their traditional courses. These things must evolve and adapt to the online classroom. A professor in an online class can facilitate a dialogue through a discussion board. The professor can pose a question that requires students to synthesize information presented in their textbook and other class materials. The students are required to write their answer to the question that is supported by information

presented in their textbook and other class materials, another student can respond to the original post, and then the first student can respond back to the other student. The professor could set up a number of times that students must respond to each other. This back and forth format represents a discussion that is similar to how a discussion could be in class. This is different because it is in written form and allows more time for students to formulate their responses. Students who struggle to communicate in written form may have difficulty participating in this form of discussion. It would be important for students to develop effective writing skills. Professors also have to change their teaching practices because they are not able to speak directly with students unless they have synchronous meetings. Professors could record a lecture and upload the video for students to view. This would be an effective way to provide students an opportunity to see their teacher instructing them. However, this lecture is not the same as an in-class lecture because the professor is not able to do formative assessments to ensure students are understanding the lecture. Students are also not able to ask questions in real time. Professors may also have to change the way they assess student learning because formative assessments are more difficult to do because of the lack of face-to-face interaction. A formative assessment could occur through evaluating the discussing board posts to ensure their students are understanding the material of the class. Summative assessments could be similar in an online class because professors can still have testing that occurs throughout the course. The online class may have the same learning objectives as a traditional class. However, professors must change how students meet the learning objectives because their teaching methods and assessment methods changed.

One participant expressed frustration about the routine of online learning. He described that most assignments entailed reading an article and posting on the discussion board with some

research to support his opinion. He wished his professors had used other teaching methods to diversify the routine and evaluation methods used to assess student learning. Other participants supported that they had to post on a discussion board and perform a lot of research. Lei and Gupta (2010) described how professors may have difficulty motivating students, assessing students' affective traits, and preventing cheating on quizzes and tests. By offering other methods of learning, students may be more engaged with the course. Some learners prefer to read text, while others prefer listening to lectures or participating in a classroom discussion. Professors could require each student to make a video presentation about a specific topic or a chapter from a textbook to evaluate their understanding of the content.

Technology is growing and changing rapidly. An example of new technology is virtual reality. Online programs could benefit from offering students an opportunity to virtually experience being a school counselor and apply their knowledge and skills before the students enter a practicum or internship. Students could enter a virtual school as the school counselor. They would perform the duties of a school counselor through virtual scenarios. The professor could choose the scenario and level of complexity based on where the students are developmentally in the program. For example, a virtual student could come with an academic issue such as failing a course. The online student acting as the school counselor would virtually engage with the student. After this scenario is complete, the professor could review the scenario and offer feedback about what the online student did well and areas for improvement.

Participants completed practicums and internships during their programs. During these internships, four participants described not getting what they needed from their supervisors, whether it was because they did not get enough time with them, had differences in training for the role of a school counselor, or were separated geographically. One way online programs

could work to improve the supervision offered to students is by providing training for students' onsite supervisors. Since it is an online program, it can be assumed the onsite supervisors are in different geographic locations. The practicum or internship professor could host a webinar. The onsite supervisors could attend the lecture. The webinar could outline the program's expectations and requirements of the practicum and internship students, and also the program's expectations of an onsite supervisor. After the professor completes the presentation, the onsite supervisors could have time to ask questions and have a discussion about how they can be effective supervisors. Professors and supervisors could also hold meetings to ensure supervision is conducted in a way that is beneficial to students. These meetings could be at the midpoint of the semester, and at the end of the semester. During the meetings, professors and supervisors have an opportunity to discuss the supervision that is provided to students and how the program can support supervisors in providing effective supervision. This is also an opportunity for the supervisor to offer verbal feedback about the practicum or internship student's performance.

In summary, online education is a viable option for people who want to earn a master's degree especially for nontraditional students. Programs can continue to improve the training for their faculty by offering education and mentoring on how to design online courses with a variety of teaching and evaluating strategies and also how to use technology to close the gap between an online program and a traditional program. Faculty must work to continue to develop relationships with their students because the level of connectedness impacts student learning and engagement. Online programs can promote how accessible they are to diverse populations. Participants acknowledged this was an added value to their program. Therefore, faculty can encourage students to interact with their peers who have a different context from them and facilitate discussions between students to allow expression of their different perspectives.

Implications for Future Professional School Counselors

The narratives of participants demonstrated what they needed from their programs depended on the context of their position. Participants believed they received a good foundation about how to be a school counselor. Participants reflected on what their school and school district required of them. According to the participants, they needed slightly different skills to be effective in their specific context. It would be impossible to prepare every school counselor for every possible school environment. Therefore, it is important for future professional school counselors to understand school-counseling programs can give students a solid foundation. However, as school counselors, they will need to continue learning once they become professional school counselors. Beginning school counselors could also benefit from a mentoring system, especially school counselors who work as lone school counselors. A network of professionals in similar contexts could benefit from being able to interact with each other. State counseling associations could host webinars once a month to support the needs of new school counselors. The webinars could be divided by elementary, middle school, high school, and K-12. The first meeting of the year could be an introductory meeting for school counselors to meet other new school counselors around the state. The school counselors could introduce themselves and their district. After the first meeting, the state school counseling association could have specific topics it will address during the meeting. The topics would be specific to each state's educational system and the level of school counseling. At the end of each meeting, there could be some time devoted to school counselors seeking consultation on specific issues at their schools. School counselors could receive valuable information and mentoring as well as connecting with other school counselors to develop a network of support.

ASCA (2012) recommend that 80% or more of the school counselors' time should be spent with direct or indirect student services, and "program management and school support (20 percent or less). Program management includes foundation, management, accountability tasks and fair-share responsibilities" (ASCA, 2012, pg. 130). According to the time-task analysis that participants sent as artifacts, participants spent most of their days meeting with students. However, they reported these meetings were mostly individual student planning about the student's school schedule or planning for post-high school plans. Participants did not report they were doing group counseling and had limited reports about individual counseling. It seems that participants were working with their students the majority of their time, but there was a greater focus on the academic and career domain. There seemed to be more limited time working with students on personal/social development. There could be several reasons this is happening. One reason could be that participants were not as well prepared in this area, and there needs to be more training in their program. Another reason could be that participants need to be more intentional about scheduling time for individual and group counseling. Whichever the reason, it seems that professional school counselors need to work toward having more of a balance in all three domains. The first thing school counselors need to do is a time-task analysis, so they have an understanding of how they are dividing up their time between the three domains. Once the school counselors have an understanding of how they are spending their time, they can reflect on the needs of the school and student body. They can develop an understanding of the needs by doing a needs assessment and reviewing the academic achievement of the different student groups and gaining awareness of the gaps. Once they have completed these things, the school counselors can develop a plan to address the academic, personal, and career needs of students. The plan will look different based on the school grade level and the individual needs of the

school. However, school counselors need to ensure they are being intentional in working with all three domains. School counselors will also have to work with the principal and the teachers, so they understand the importance of guidance lessons, individual or group counseling, academic development and career development. The principal, teachers, and school counselors need to plan how school counselors could be more visible in the classroom without teachers feeling they are sacrificing too much instructional time.

Limitations

Finding participants who met the inclusion criteria was challenging due to the difficulty of gaining access to school counselors who earned an online degree from a CACREP program. Some states would not allow the researcher access to their listservs to recruit participants. Once participants were recruited, they were open to sharing their experiences.

The research study was an exploratory study to being understanding and representing participants' narratives of attending a CACREP online school counseling and how they perceive they were prepared to be professional school counselors. The researcher met the minimum requirements of persistent and prolonged engagement as needed by this research study. Prolonged engagement is defined as spending time learning about the environment and the context being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher spent time developing an understanding of the online programs the participants attended as well as learning about the schools where they worked. Therefore, she met the requirement of prolonged engagement. However, the researcher offers recommendations to improve the prolonged engagement if similar research is conducted. Persistent engagement is defined as spending enough time in the environment to understand the context. Enough time is defined by the need and purpose of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher had persistent engagement as needed by the study

because she was able to develop an understanding of the participants' narratives and represent the themes that emerged. Even though persistent engagement occurred, the researcher offers suggestions for how it could be improved for future research.

Participants had different numbers of years of experience, and the study did not follow the participants over time. Their differences in experience could impact their perceptions of how they were prepared by their online program to be a professional school counselor. As participants gained experience as school counselors, they could have developed a different view of what they needed from their programs. If the study had been longitudinal, more opportunities would have been available to observe and interview participants and gain their perceptions. It could impact persistent and prolonged engagement.

The context of their school counseling position was important for understanding their perceived preparation. While their context was important, the researcher was not able to visit each individual school. Therefore, the understanding of each context was based on the participant's description of their school, their role, and their duties. Being able to visit the participants' school sites could influence persistent and prolonged engagement.

Recommendations for Future Research

Online education is a growing field but lacks research on online school-counseling programs. This research study initiates understanding of the experience of school counselors who graduated from an online school-counseling program and how it translated into practice. To continue to grow this research study, the researcher would recommend having more participants and following them over time. The researcher could conduct more interviews to add depth to the narratives that were collected and also visit the participants' school sites. By visiting the school sites, the researcher can observe the environment and the participant performing their role as a

professional school counselor. Adding the element of direct observation, the researcher can have a deeper understanding of how the school counselors perform their role and how their training prepared them to be professional school counselors. By doing more interviews and visiting the school sites, the researcher will be able to have better prolonged engagement.

The current research study relied on participant self-report about how they perform the duties and responsibilities of a school counselor. To expand knowledge of the possible difference between school counselors who earned a degree online versus a degree from a traditional program, it could be valuable to interview principals who have employed school counselors from the two different types of programs. Interviews with principals could expand understanding of how online programs are preparing school counselors. These interviews could also aid understanding about whether school districts prefer school counselors with online training or face-to-face training. Online degree programs are growing, but there is still some skepticism that persists about the quality of education students are receiving. Interviewing principals who have hired and worked with school counselors who earned their degree online may speak to their perception of quality and how online programs can continue to meet the needs of schools and the ever-changing role of a school counselor. These interviews can also help with understanding how principals view the differences and similarities of online education and traditional face-to-face programs.

It would also be valuable to expand the accreditation criteria of online programs. Some states have a requirement that their school counselors attend CACREP-accredited online programs, whereas other states do not. Therefore, school counselors who attend programs without this accreditation may or may not have a different experience that impacts their foundation for being a professional school counselor.

To better understand the unique challenges of online CACREP school counseling programs, the researcher would recommend interviewing the faculty of different programs. The faculty could describe how they prepared to be an online professor, prepare their class, create learning objectives, and assess students. The researcher can also gather information about how professors' view creating relationships with students, facilitating relationships between peers, and utilizing and teaching diversity in their courses. This information can give another perspective to the themes that developed in this research study.

It was recommended that mentoring could help improve faculty attitudes. However, the mentoring that was offered was not detailed. The field may benefit from research regarding implementation of mentoring systems and the outcomes. This knowledge could help with understanding the challenges faculty face and what support they need to be effective online professors.

Participants shared about the importance of developing a relationship with their faculty. They acknowledged how the relationships affected their engagement. Research needs to be conducted to understand how these relationships develop, potential barriers to developing relationships, and how relationships affect student success in online programs. Participants disclosed their views on this topic, but further research could go more in-depth.

Participants also had mixed views on the importance of peer relationships. It would be interesting to find out how students in online programs work with their peers and the depth of the relationships. The researcher could investigate how students engage with their peers, positive outcomes of student interactions, barriers to student interactions, reasons for not engaging with other students, and how students perceive how the relationships or lack of relationships impact their learning.

Participants expressed concerns about the supervision they received from their onsite supervisors. A research study could be conducted to explore how students select their practicum and internship sites, and how the online program connects with the sites and site supervisors to explain program requirements of the students and supervision. This study could investigate how site supervisors are trained and how the professors monitor the supervision that is offered to their students.

Participants also explained that student diversity added value to their online experience. However, they did not share exactly how the program promoted diversity and multicultural competence. A study could be conducted exploring how programs develop multicultural competence within their students. The study could include interviews from professors and students to have a holistic understanding of how these methods are taught from a faculty and a student perspective.

This research study is about how professional school counselors perceive they were prepared by their online program. To continue to grow this knowledge, it would be valuable to understand how the ASCA National Model and the competencies were taught in their program and how the professional school counselors use what they learned in their school. For example, what were the students taught about accountability and how this training being used or not used in their school.

To summarize, the recommendations for future research are listed below.

- Expanding the current research study with more participants, following them over a longer period of time, and direct observations.
- Interviewing principals about their perceptions of online programs versus face-to-face programs.

- Researching online programs with other accreditations
- Interviewing faculty about being a professor in an online program
- Examining mentoring in online programs
- Researching how relationships between faculty and students develop, potential barriers, and impact on learning
- Exploring how relationships between students develop, potential barriers, and impact on learning
- Research about onsite supervision that occurs and how programs educate supervisors and monitor the supervision they are providing
- Investigating how ASCA is taught in online programs and how participants use what was taught in their roles as professional school counselors

Conclusion

This research study begins the process of understanding online education from a student perspective. Online education has not been extensively researched, and no research exists on online school-counseling programs. It will be important to continue to research how colleges and universities train professional school counselors through an online format, and how this impacts school counselors' practice.

Six participants shared their narratives. The researcher analyzed these narratives for individual experiences and then as a group to understand the similarities and the differences among experiences. Social constructionism provided the viewpoint of analysis of narratives to understand how the narratives created a shared meaning about online education. This research highlighted why people may choose an online program over a traditional program, and what was important to participants such as developing interpersonal relationships, experiencing student

diversity, and experiencing independent learning. Participants perceived they were prepared to be professional school counselors. However, individual needs, according to their individual school's expectations for the school counselors and the needs of the students, differed.

Participants' narratives and the themes that emerged from the research demonstrated a continued need for understanding of online education and how it impacts school-counselor training.

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Appendix A

Dear members of CESNET-L,

My name is Rebecca van der Hagen. I am a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas's Counselor Education and Supervision program. I am seeking participants for my dissertation. It is titled Exploring School Counselors' Narratives of CACREP Accredited Online Education Programs: A Phenomenological Study. Participants will be interviewed about their training experience and how it prepared them for their role as a school counselor.

To participate in the study, a person must have earned a master's degree from an online school counseling program that is accredited by CACREP. The participants must also be a current school counselor with at least one year in their current school counseling position.

Participants who complete the initial interview, the follow-up interview, time-task analysis, and provide artifacts will receive a twenty-dollar amazon gift card.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please contact me at my university email: rtvander@uark.edu.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board 17-01-372 at the University of Arkansas. The advisor for my dissertation is Dr. Kristi Perryman.

Thank you in advance for your consideration!

Sincerely, Rebecca van der Hagen Doctoral Candidate University of Arkansas

IRB #17-01-372 Approved: 05/09/2017 Expires: 02/12/2018

Appendix B

Dear Department Chair,

My name is Rebecca van der Hagen. I am a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas's Counselor Education and Supervision program. I am recruiting participants for my dissertation study. I would appreciate it if you would forward the below email to students who have graduated from your program.

Greetings,

My name is Rebecca van der Hagen. I am a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas's Counselor Education and Supervision program. I am seeking participants for my dissertation. It is titled Exploring School Counselors' Narratives of CACREP Accredited Online Education Programs: A Phenomenological Study. Participants will be interviewed about their training experience and how it prepared them for their role as a school counselor.

To participate in the study, a person must have earned a master's degree from an online school counseling program that is accredited by CACREP. The participants must also be a current school counselor with at least one year in their current school counseling position.

Participants who complete the initial interview, the follow-up interview, time-task analysis, and provide artifacts will receive a twenty-dollar amazon gift card.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board 17-01-372 at the University of Arkansas. The advisor for my dissertation is Dr. Kristi Perryman.

Thank you in advance for your consideration!

Sincerely, Rebecca van der Hagen Doctoral Candidate University of Arkansas

IRB #17-01-372 Approved: 05/09/2017 Expires: 02/12/2018

Appendix C

Dear Professional School Counselors,

My name is Rebecca van der Hagen. I am a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas's Counselor Education and Supervision program. I am seeking participants for my dissertation. It is titled Exploring School Counselors' Narratives of CACREP Accredited Online Education Programs: A Phenomenological Study. Participants will be interviewed about their training experience and how it prepared them for their role as a school counselor.

To participate in the study, a person must have earned a master's degree from an online school counseling program that is accredited by CACREP. The participants must also be a current school counselor with at least one year in their current school counseling position.

Participants who complete the initial interview, the follow-up interview, time-task analysis, and provide artifacts will receive a twenty-dollar amazon gift card.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please contact me at my university email: rtvander@uark.edu.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board 17-01-372 at the University of Arkansas. The advisor for my dissertation is Dr. Kristi Perryman.

Thank you in advance for your consideration!

Sincerely, Rebecca van der Hagen Doctoral Candidate University of Arkansas

IRB #17-01-372 Approved: 05/09/2017 Expires: 02/12/2018

Appendix D



UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS

May 11, 2017

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

MEMORANDUM

TO: Rebecca van der Hagen
Kristi Perryman

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: PROJECT MODIFICATION

IRB Protocol #: 17-01-372

Protocol Title: *Exploring School Counselors' Narratives of CACREP Accredited Online Education Programs: A Phenomenological Study*

Review Type: ☐ EXEMPT ☒ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 05/09/2017 Expiration Date: 02/12/2018

Your request to modify the referenced protocol has been approved by the IRB. **This protocol is currently approved for 8 total participants.** If you wish to make any further modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

Please note that this approval does not extend the Approved Project Period. Should you wish to extend your project beyond the current expiration date, you must submit a request for continuation using the UAF IRB form "Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects." The request should be sent to the IRB Coordinator, 109 MLKG Building.

For protocols requiring FULL IRB review, please submit your request at least one month prior to the current expiration date. (High-risk protocols may require even more time for approval.) For protocols requiring an EXPEDITED or EXEMPT review, submit your request at least two weeks prior to the current expiration date. Failure to obtain approval for a continuation *on or prior to* the currently approved expiration date will result in termination of the protocol and you will be required to submit a new protocol to the IRB before continuing the project. Data collected past the protocol expiration date may need to be eliminated from the dataset should you wish to publish. Only data collected under a currently approved protocol can be certified by the IRB for any purpose.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

Appendix E

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY Title of Project: Exploration of

School Counselors' Story of Online Education Programs

Principal Investigator(s): **Rebecca van der Hagen, candidate for Ph.D. in Counselor**

Education and Supervision rtvander@uark.edu 918-346-1626

Faculty Advisor(s): **Kristi, Perryman, Ph.D., RPT-S**

Graduate Education klperryman@uark.edu

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the current study is to explore school counselors' story of earning their school counseling masters through a CACREP online school counseling program.

Procedures to be Followed: You are being asked to participate in the current study due to your current status as K-12 school counselor with at least one year in this position, and a master's degree from a CACREP online program. School counselors are being asked to tell their story of their training and how it prepared them for their school counseling position. They will be contacted by the researcher to schedule an interview. The first interview will take 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews will take place either face-to-face or through HIPAA compliant video conferencing software. The interviews will be video recorded. The interviews will be transcribed and analyzed. After the transcription and analyzation, participants will be contacted to check the accuracy of the transcription and any follow up questions. The participants will also be asked to complete a time-task analysis for ten school days. This document will help with understanding how the school counselor uses his or her time. The participants will also be asked for artifacts such as graduate class syllabi, practicum/internship hour logs, and a favorite class assignment.

Discomforts and Risks: There are no anticipated risks associated with this study.

Benefits: The information collected from the interview may help counselor educators have a better understanding of online programs, thus leading to changes in graduate curriculum as needed to best prepare future school counselors. Participants who complete the initial interview, the follow-up interview, time-task analysis, and provide artifacts will receive a twenty-dollar amazon gift card.

Duration: Participation in the current study involves participation in a 60 to 90 minute interview and a 30 minute follow up interview that will take place within sixty days after the initial interview. **Statement of Confidentiality:** As a participant of this study, your confidentiality will be protected using pseudonyms. Interview transcripts will be on a password protected computer. All identifying information will be excluded from any data reporting. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in these interviews is completely voluntary. You may decide to not participate or to stop participating at any point without any negative repercussions.

Informed Consent: I have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks, and the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from this study at any time. The investigator has explained each of these items to me, and I believe that I understand what is involved. I know that the researcher listed above will be able to answer any questions I may have. If, at any time, I feel my questions have not been adequately answered, I may request to speak with the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board for Protections of Human Subjects (Attention: Ro Windwalker, 109 MLKG Building. 479-575-2208, irb@uark.edu).

Date

Principal Researcher Signature

Participant Signature Date

IRB #17-01-372 Approved: 05/09/2017 Expires: 02/12/2018

Appendix F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographic Information**General Information**

Sex:

Age:

Race:

CACREP Online Program

Type of Program: Synchronous Asynchronous

Cohort Model: Yes No

Program located in the state you live: Yes No

School Counseling Information

Level of School Counseling:

Years at current job:

Previous School Counseling Jobs:

Total Number of years as a school counselor:

Online Program Questions

- What led you to choose an online school counseling program?
- What were your expectations of your online program?
- How would you describe your online program?
- What was your favorite part of being trained online?
- What was your least favorite part of being trained online?
- If you would change or add anything to your program, what would it be?
- Which class was your favorite? Why?
- Tell me about your interactions with your professors.
- Describe any time you spent face-to-face with your professors. How often?
- Tell me about your interactions with your peers.
- Describe any time you spent face-to-face with your peers. How often?
- Tell about your time spent on the institutions' campus.
- Tell me about your training experience in individual and group counseling.
- What was your practicum experience like?
- What was your internship experience like?

Professional School Counseling Questions

- How would you define your role as a school counselor?
- Tell me about a typical day in your position.
- Tell me about your classroom guidance.
- Tell me about your responsive service duties.
- How do you meet the academic needs of your students?

- How do you meet the personal/social needs of your students?
 - How do you meet the career needs of your students?
- How did your online program prepare you for your current position